

THE CONTRARIAN
2021 EDITION



REEXAMINING
INEQUALITY
in India



THE ECONOMICS MAGAZINE
JESUS & MARY COLLEGE



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*'Contrarian' means au contraire to popular
opinion or the prevalent status quo.*



EDITORS'

NOTE

A theoretical law in physics propounds that the entropy or disorderliness of a system, under certain caveats, only increases with time. It is by virtue then that the system becomes highly disorganized over time; considerable involvement is required to prevent this inevitable descent to chaos. To most, disorderliness is unappealing due to the arbitrariness of its nature and so, inequality, by being innately arbitrary and disorderly, is abhorrent.

Under the imposing aegis of neoclassical economics in our late-capitalist order, it is a Herculean task to understand, let alone reexamine a subject as multitudinous, subjective and pervasive as inequality; Amartya Sen's book, *Inequality Reexamined* (1992) provided us with a robust thematic foundation for the same. Through his pioneering capabilities approach, Sen describes various perspectives on inequality in the context of a social system. The sources of inequality in a social system showcase the arbitrariness of the existence of such inequality since it mostly arises out of human differences in terms of gender, race, sex, caste, language and religion. And as none of these differences are controlled for, inequality on such basis becomes unreasonable.

Carrying forward, yet deviating from Sen's purely conceptual *modus operandi*, this edition of *The Contrarian* attempts to analyze inequality in praxis, in the uniquely subjective context of India. As a society, India is singular due to the sheer vastness of diversity it encompasses. While equality is unrelated to the homogeneity of identities, human differences get propounded in Indian society due to the prevalence of cultural and social constructs that uphold discrimination based on differential

identities. Thus, economic inequality and social inequality intersect in many ways to precipitate unique hindrances to the pursuit of individual functions. That the task of examining inequality in India is daunting, is an understatement. The challenge set before us was two-fold: to identify the various manifestations of inequality in India and to analyze their intersection with economic inequality.

This edition features articles that achieve in addressing a gamut of these inequalities; we reexamine gender inequality vis-à-vis female employment and education. Epistemological articles address the skewed access to social infrastructure in our country, in the context of caste and class differentials. Critique of capitalism and particularly, the failure of state machinery in reducing inequality is prevalent in this publication. The images and photographs accompanying the articles are conscientiously designed to depict the intent of the text accurately.

The drafting process of this edition has been educational and enlightening for us. By virtue of this journey, we as a magazine, as a team of female undergraduate students in a public university, found our footing, our voice and its importance within the intimidatingly vast and intricate sphere of academia. We realize that ours is not the sole effort at understanding the issue and implications of inequality in India. However, it is the novelty of the team's approach, the ambition to address this issue without trepidation and with utmost solemnity, and in particular, our commitment to equality that validates and explains the title 'Reexamining Inequality in India'.

Regards,

ARUNIMA SRIVASTAVA

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

PRISHA SAXENA

DEPUTY EDITOR

FROM THE TEACHER IN CHARGE



The theme for the 2021 edition of The Contrarian magazine is 'Reexamining Inequality in India'. Economic inequality, in the form of unequal distribution of income and income yielding assets, continues to be a serious problem for our country. India's nominal GDP in USD is ranked number 5 in the world and our GDP on PPP basis is ranked the number 3 in the world, only behind China and the US. However, our GDP per capita in 2020 is 2,338 USD which is at 139th rank in world. Further, a large majority of our population is earning much less than our per capita GDP. According to a report, two-third of our population is surviving on less than Rs.100 a day, which is approximately 1.25 USD. A vast majority of India's population is unable to participate in economic growth due to poor access to education and health facilities.

Since independence, successive governments have been claiming that the percentage of population below poverty line is falling. The truth is that our benchmark of poverty is so low that it is not sufficient for adequate nutrition for an individual. At best, poverty line should be understood as hunger line. People below the poverty line are not simply poor but are actually starving. On the other side is India that is shining. We can boast of skyscrapers, highways, super-specialty hospitals, world-class educational institutions, giant corporations and some of the richest individuals in the world. Thus, we have India on one side, which is shining, and Bharat on the other side, which is stagnant and starving.

Over the years, real wages of industrial workers have risen at a very slow rate. Agricultural incomes of marginal farmers have failed to keep pace with inflation. The plight of farmers is best understood in terms of the rising number of farmers' suicides. On the other hand, the income of the top 1% has been rising steadily over the years. Today, the top 1% owns more than 60% of assets and their share in the growth of income is 73%.

Inequality is rising and the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. This has serious social, economic and political repercussions. It is high time that our policymakers should take cognizance of this problem and try to find an early solution.



~Ms Rajni Singh,
Teacher in Charge,
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TEACHERS'

ARTICLES



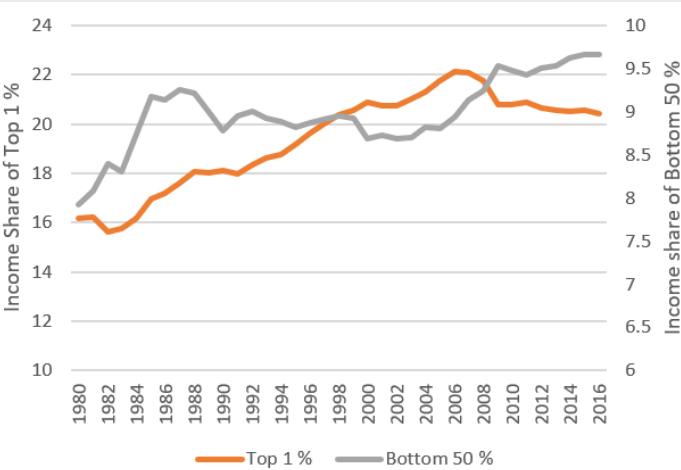


CLASS CONFLICT – SMITHIAN ANALYSIS

BY MS JASMIN
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The global economy is grappling with the “challenge” of growing inequality, a challenge on social, economic and political grounds. Talking of economic inequality in particular; both wealth and income inequality have risen around the world. Figure 1 shows the share of the top 1 % and the bottom 50 % in the pre-tax national income for the world. The data reflects that income inequality has risen at a rapid pace. Also, there is evidence of concentration of wealth, the wealth to income ratios as argued by Piketty (2014) are on a rise in the developed nations.

Figure 1 Income Inequality - World

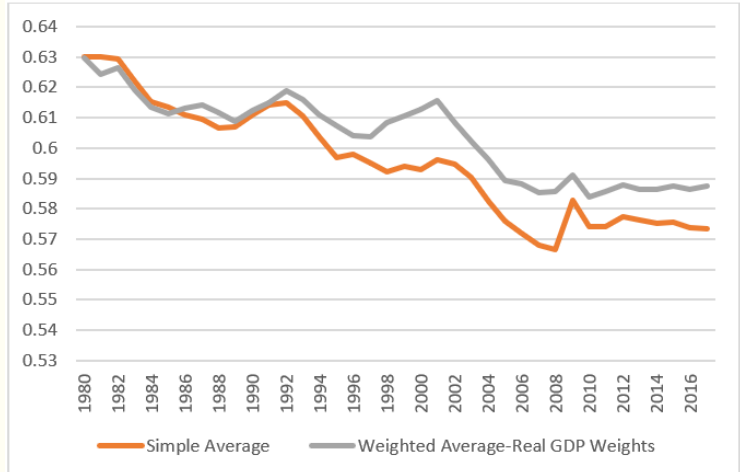


Source: World Inequality Database

While the existing literature focuses too much on personal income distribution, the dimension of functional income distribution and class conflict has remained understudied. Empirical evidence suggests that the labour income share has exhibited a secular decline since 1980s. Figure 2 shows the persistent decline in labour share

of the high income countries.[1] Simple average of the labour share of the upper middle-income countries also shows a downward trend, with only a recent uptick. In the year 1980, the average labour share of the upper middle-income countries was 51%, this fell to 46.8% in 2005, the corresponding figure for the year 2017 was 49.5%. The data for lower-middle and low-income countries is limited.

Figure 2 Labour Share-High Income Countries



Source: Author’s Computation using PENN World Tables

Elements of class conflict in the theory of inequality can be traced back to classical economics. While Marx based his theory on the power relations between capitalists and the workers, one can get a glimpse of this tussle between the two classes in the works of Adam Smith as well.

Adam Smith in his magnum opus, The Wealth of Nations, brings out the relation of contradiction between three classes; Landlords, Entrepreneurs (masters) and Labourers (workmen). He discusses how in the most primitive stages of the society, when no capital has been accumulated, the produce of the labour solely belongs to the labour. As society advances, the wealth gets concentrated in a few hands and land becomes private property. With this advancement, landlords and masters emerge. A portion of the produce then has to be given up in the form of rent to the landlords as a license to use land and in the form of profits to the entrepreneurs.

Wages depend on the bargaining between workers and masters. Masters being fewer in number are able to tacitly combine and suppress the wages. There is no law to prohibit such tacit collusions. It is in the interest of the masters to compress the wages as much as possible, most often to match a subsistence level wage.

In a developing society as the land becomes scarce, the rents rise. Wages also might rise in the short run as the demand for labour increases and this might shrink profits. But in the long run, consequences are quite different. Any technical improvements which may raise the productivity of land and labour may be pocketed by the landlords and entrepreneurs respectively. Workers are weak to fight oppression; in the long run, they are pushed back to subsistence while landlords and masters eat away the produce.

Smith also talks about the conflict between landlords and entrepreneur. Landlords, according to Smith, favour economic expansion as it raises rents; on the other hand, the merchants and entrepreneurs make all the effort to limit competition which helps them accumulate more capital and solidifies their power. He states that the profits are the highest in the economies which are moving fastest towards ruin. Rent and wages, on the other hand, rise with economic progress. It would be incorrect to say that Smith's system supported inequality. He was a proponent of adequate wages to the labour and taxation of luxuries. He discussed how rich and powerful often used law to get their way and oppress the workers. Smith's theory of production, therefore addresses the issue of class antagonism and distribution, production and distribution in his theory are determined jointly.

It is imperative to understand the theoretical foundations underlying functional income distribution to analyse the growing disparity in the factor income shares. Alternative schools of thought extend explanations for the declining labour income share, pointing out key potential factors behind the downtrend. While Smith did not comprehensively discuss distribution, it is an excellent starting point to understand other paradigms and frameworks.

Notes

1. *High Income Countries - Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Korea, Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, United Kingdom, United States*

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INEQUITIES IN HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE IN INDIA

BY MS MEGHA JACOB
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India witnesses widening differentials in health outcomes mainly caused by socioeconomic inequalities and inequities in provision and access to health services (John & Jacob, 2016). This has adversely affected India's health outcomes (*Table 1*). Over the years, we have witnessed several states in India faring poorly in health outcomes, which called for a change in the approach to health care delivery. The spotlight is now falling on the effectiveness of a decentralized approach with a more prominent role for local governance institutions, especially post India's encounter with health shocks like the Nipah Virus, Chikungunya and now, COVID-19.

Interstate variability in health outcomes is increasing, and there are notable differences between the Southern and Northern states of India. Basic health infrastructure is missing in Jharkhand and Bihar, where the utilisation rate of public health services is abysmally low (23% and 7%, respectively), against the all-India figure of 33% (Goel & Khera, 2015). The inability of the state governments to address problems in the area of the public health delivery system has compelled local government institutions to join hands with the state government to improve its functioning (John and Jacob, 2016).

Thus, there is a need to apply collaborative governance to public health in India (Kirk Emerson, 2017). In terms of traditional indicators, the performance of Kerala's health sector is among the best in the country and is even comparable to that of developed countries (Panikar, 1999). The 'Kerala Model' of health is

based on strong coordination between the state government and the local government institutions, i.e., a decentralized healthcare system (Soutik Biswas 2020).

In an article titled *India's Covid-19 response shifts to states*, published on May 21, 2020, in the Indian Express, it was stated that 30 municipalities in India together account for 79 per cent of India's Covid-19 cases! This makes one wonder what are the factors that determine the spread of an infectious disease like COVID-19. Could the spread be due to higher population density, high level of economic activities, migration or weak local governance? This is why health economists across India are now trying to answer these questions by studying the impact of local governance and health infrastructure.

Indicator	India	China	Bangladesh	Sri Lanka	Pakistan	Brazil	Nepal
Infant Mortality Rate (per 1000 live births)	38	9	31	8	66	15	29
Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births)	174	27	176	30	178	44	258
Per capita government expenditure on health (PPP, \$)	75	420	31	127	36	947	40
Out-of-pocket health expenditure (%)	89.2	72.3	92.9	95.8	86.8	47.2	79.9

Table 1: Key Health Indicators (India & neighbouring countries), Source: World Health Statistics Report, 2015, World Bank Data

In India, there's also a huge disparity in the distribution of doctors working in urban and rural areas, with the urban to rural doctor density ratio being 3.8:1. On analysing the classification of Indian states/UTs, according to the average rural population covered by a Community Health centre (CHC), one can clearly see that states like Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Odisha and most of the North-Eastern States of India fall within the category of less than 1 lakh population covered. This means that in these states the

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accessibility to CHCs by their respective population is high. On the other extreme lies Bihar (category of over 5 lakh average rural population covered per CHC). Even in states like Punjab, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, the accessibility to CHCs by their respective population is low (2-5 lakhs average rural population covered per CHC), as per Rural Health Statistics, 2018-19.

A major portion of India's population is not served in healthcare. As per a report by the Centre for Disease Dynamics, Economics and Policy, a Washington D.C. based research organization, India has a doctor-to-patient ratio of 1:10,189, which is around 10 times lower than the 1:1,000 recommended by the World Health Organization. India urgently needs a doubling of the number of doctors and at least three times as many nurses and five times the paramedics it now has.

Western countries evolved into a massive care-driven health care ecosystem. While India has a consumer-led health care ecosystem. Insurance penetration in India is only around 15%. Patients' ability to pay progressively lowers from urban to semi-urban and rural markets because it's all out-of-pocket expenditure in the absence of insurance.

Thus, one can clearly see that the need of the hour is to address the persistence of inequities in health and access to health services in India. Major areas that require attention include the introduction of innovative systems of monitoring, evaluation of progress towards equitable health outcomes and strengthening democracy in the functioning of public health delivery systems, i.e. to focus on collaborative governance (between states and local government institutions) in building a strong and resilient healthcare structure in India to help tackle healthcare emergencies in the future.

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ALUMANAE
ARTICLES

INEQUALITY IN YOUR FACE

BY TANVI AGGARWAL,
CLASS OF 2020

Inequality is a reality for 800 million people in India who constitute 6.7% of the global poor. The pandemic has brought the campaign for universal eradication of poverty and inequality to the forefront of all policy discussions. During the past six months, it became evident that our country's healthcare system is afflicted with inefficiencies like the poor doctor to population ratio (1:1456), drug shortages, lack of unemployment benefits.

When we talk about inequality, we usually have flashbacks of the slum settlements, malnourished children, and other extreme poverty conditions. We need to see inequality in not just outcome that is the lack of income but also as inequality of opportunity that is the lack of the means/resources to escape poverty. Millions of students are unable to study due to the pandemic since, online classrooms have become the new norm. The widening gap in access to technology, as millions of students remain unconnected or underserved, has halted their education.

The rising inequality may have more drastic consequences for us than expected. It is not about the inability to afford a better house or a car but rather the inability to live a longer and healthier life. The pandemic has led to 12,000 people dying from COVID-related hunger every day. According to an Oxfam report, 63 million Indians are pushed into poverty because of healthcare costs every year—almost two people every second. Although it is important to quantify and enumerate the poor for the purpose of policy prescription, I believe no statistic can fully explain the true economic cost and multidimensional nature of poverty.

The paragon of a successful society is one where every citizen has freedom and equality of opportunity. Poverty and inequality will always persist, we can never have equality among the privileged and the poor. However, we can persist to create as equitable a society as possible— have universal coverage of food security, sanitation facilities, healthcare and education that are essential for human sustenance. These essentially should be a public good but have become heavily privatized due to lack of policy intervention.

While inequality of outcome is based on an ex-post approach that only takes into consideration material dimensions such as income or consumption, the inequality of opportunities suggests that inequality should be measured by factors affecting one's potential or outcome, thus taking an ex-ante approach. The lack of opportunity widens the income gap that further asserts the state of poverty. This phenomenon, known as "circular cumulative causation", was introduced first by a Swedish economist, Gunnar Myrdal. According to this theory, a change in one form of institution would lead to successive rapid changes in other institutions of our society, thus bringing about a transformation in the allocation and distribution of resources. It was first propounded by Amartya Sen who defined development and well-being in terms of expansion of functioning and capabilities. The economist places emphasis on the accessibility of quality education, healthcare, nutrition as a criterion for development. Thus, we not only understand inequality in terms of disparity in income or economic assets but also, how people can materialize their potential by freeing themselves from hunger, ignorance and diseases.

Inequality seems to be more prone and widespread in late industrialisers that were left crippled due to prolonged wars or colonialization and have not been able to recoup from the economic losses. With having to suffer the consequences of late industrialization, and hence, deferred economic growth; developing countries like China and India will not let history repeat itself. According to the World Bank, more than 850 million Chinese people have been lifted out of extreme poverty; China's poverty rate fell fr-

om 88 percent in 1981 to 0.7 percent in 2015. While to this day, 68.8% of the Indian population lives on less than \$2 a day. The focus of macroeconomic policies is now towards fostering inclusive growth by redistributing wealth from the high-income to the deprived. However, this would not contribute towards equality of opportunity. A society can be said to provide equal opportunities when circumstances do not determine the differences in life outcomes (Ferreira et al., 2009).

It seems that the pandemic has shed light on the deep-rooted problems that plague the developing countries which we seem to have neglected in the race to become an “economic superpower”. While we climb the ladder of economic growth, we have left behind millions of people who form an integral part of our society and have equal rights to live a life free of servitude, ignorance and poverty. The pandemic provides an excellent opportunity to rebuild our society into a more equitable and sustainable environment.

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Cato the Eco Cat



Line art by: Janaki Kriti
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GENDER INEQUALITY

BY SIMRAN GARG,
CLASS OF 2020

“India is a sex-segregated traditional society whose deeply entrenched customs and practices are sanctioned by almost all religions” (Suvarna et al., 2019). Since time immemorial, India has been a patriarchal society. While female literacy rate in India is around 65%, male literacy is at 82% (Census, 2011). Gender roles ensure that women stay back at home and manage the household work, depriving them of the opportunity to improve their skills through training. Culturally too, women are deprived of the opportunity to inherit ancestral property—something which a man is entitled to—denying them a chance to obtain funds to start a new business venture due to their inability to furnish collateral for the same. Additionally, the system of dowry portrays women as a ‘financial burden’ on their family and deters families from investing in their growth. Both of these factors reduce them to the position of a mute spectator in most family decisions, as their financial bargaining power is null. Since women are considered to belong to their in-laws after marriage, the return to investment on them is considered to be very low, bringing us back to the first point of low literacy rates. It is imperative to realise that due to the prevalence of joint family culture in India, it is difficult to break free from age-old, religiously-glorified, discriminatory beliefs. Even in affluent families where women might be “permitted” to work, they are expected to perform with perfection, both the duties of a wife and a professional, with little or no assistance from their partner, severely hampering their physical and mental well-being. According to a study, a woman loses 2 hours of sleep daily in their attempts to successfully juggle between home and office (Dashora, 2013).

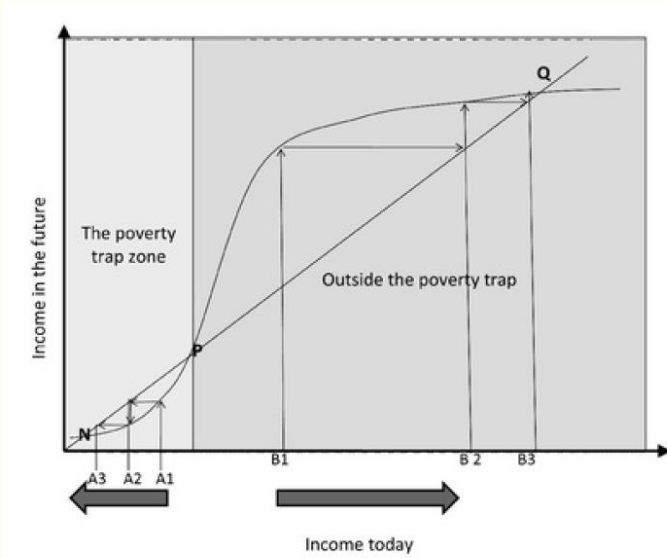
Given these multiple whammies that women face, how can one expect them to compete on an equal footing with men, just because they come from the same economic background? Even if a woman secures a job, it is either distress induced: a hypothesis suggests that women are secondary breadwinners and their employment rises during economic distress; or in “feminized”, relatively low paying sectors like care-taking, nursing, secretarial, clerical and teaching. Even when they occupy the same position, women get paid less relative to their male counterpart. Only 14% of Indian parliamentarians and 3.69% of CEOs and MDs are women (Corporate India: At only 3%, Corporate India is still struggling to bring women to the top n.d.).

Women who belong to Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes have to fight for their very survival—let alone equality of opportunity—due to their “double minority status” (Dunn, 1993). Mostly, in the name of economic migration, these women shift from performing a reproductive role such as child care in their own homes to performing identical but paid reproductive roles for families in first world countries, creating a care deficit in their home country. Moreover, most Export Processing Zones (EPZs) prefer to hire women to perform routine, mundane tasks and pay low wages, exploiting the fact that theirs is mostly distressed induced employment (Gottfried, 2013).

While providing economic resources might help to a certain limited extent, it is these very differences such as access to proper schooling and ownership of assets that put these groups at a disadvantaged position in the society. Economic and social inequality are deeply intertwined and cannot be looked at in isolation, as one almost always perpetuates the other.

Even if we limit the discussion to class inequality, as Prof. Abhijit Banerjee in his book, “Poor Economics” has explained, there is only little that one can do to help the poor to get out of the poverty trap. For them, the future income is less than the current income, causing them to move from A1 to A2

and A3 as described in the chart. (the opposite trajectory is observed for the rich). This also leads to a possible nutrition-based poverty trap where the inability to obtain proper nutrition puts them in a more disadvantaged position to perform a demanding job than the better off, thus increasing future potential incomes.



Generic poverty trap from Banerjee and Duflo (2011) *Poor Economics*, Chapter 1

Therefore, correcting these inequalities requires a much deeper understanding of what causes these economic disadvantages in the first place. While there have been substantial strides in ensuring equality of opportunity for women, we still have a long way to go. Continuous and conscious efforts from the corporate and government alike are essential to bridge the gap between a man and a woman; mere reservation might not be the answer to the problems. What is needed, is a change of mindset and a breakdown of rigid gender roles.

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INEQUALITY AS A CONSEQUENCE OF CRONY CAPITALISM?

BY SANYA SRIVASTAVA,
CLASS OF 2018

From the 'licence-quota-permit raj' to 'billionaire raj' - James Crabtree

India is the world's largest democracy, the second-most populous country and a critical powerhouse of the global economy (World Bank, 2019). Inequality in India has a distinctive history where it was socio-religiously entrenched through the caste system for many years, and now, economic inequality is plaguing India despite decades of consistent economic development. Through 1980-2015, the wealthiest sections of Indian society have disproportionately accounted for economic growth: "the top 0.1% of earners captured a higher share of total growth than the bottom 50% (12% vs. 11%), while the top 1% received a higher share of total growth than the middle 40% (29% vs. 23%)" (Chancel & Piketty, 2017).

A disturbing insight is that India's top 10 per cent earners hold 62 per cent of the country's wealth, while only 5.3 per cent wealth is held by the bottom half (Oxfam India report, 2017). This is further validated by the Global Wealth Report, 2019 that says that India's ultra-rich (having more than \$1 billion) witnessed the highest (18 per cent) growth.

Crony capitalism refers to a business atmosphere in which the competitive rules in a market economy are dissolved, mainly pertaining to the apportionment of public sector resources. This is due to the government's partisanship towards particular private enterprises: a trend that has surfaced in 'emerging market/transition economies' on the

pretext of employing market-focused economic reforms.

In recent years, the billionaire's boom and the rising inequality levels have restricted the wealth created in India to the wealthiest through inheritance and crony capitalism, while shares are further decreasing for the people at the bottom. It is quite clear that the profits of high economic growth have not translated into welfare for the common Indian. This is symptomatic of a dwindling economic system, where, even though the poor are becoming less poor, the gap between the rich and poor is ever-widening. Many ordinary Indians are not able to access the healthcare they need. 63 million of them are pushed into poverty because of healthcare costs every year (Oxfam India report, 2017). This escalating division fails democracy and endorses cronyism.

Business endeavors to impact policy outcomes are prevalent across the world. However, the high costs of doing business hurt prosperity in developing countries, leading to the question: why do authorities fail to put in place reforms that reduce these costs? The principal cause of this environment is the involvement between bureaucrats, political actors, and business insiders, resulting in the latter taking advantage of the policy loopholes and the gaps that shrink the cost of doing business, thus achieving a competitive upper hand over outsiders. By acting in a self-interest-seeking manner, these players create a low-level equilibrium that perpetuates crony capitalism and inequality to the detriment of overall prosperity (Limoeiro, 2020). Economic growth has improved the living conditions of India's citizens, but these improvements are not homogeneously distributed among its large and diverse population. In 2002, there were five Indians on the annual Forbes list of the world's billionaires. In 2018, the number has risen to 119 (Sinha, 2018). This goes to say that inequality isn't centred around billionaires but the fact that the top 10 per cent, or rather the top 1 per cent, have done unduly well. Moreover, in my opinion, inequality should be seen as an electoral issue, just as corruption is. Inequality in its most fundamental form is defined as—not having access to opportunities for growth and

where development is not seen as a freedom.

Market reforms characterize an attempt to shift India from a state engaged economy to a liberal market economy. However, under crony capitalism, certain economic players gain the skill to unswervingly influence policies in their favor and the capacity to circumvent governmental decision-making processes. This distorts the competitive system and cheats the market of its allocative equilibrium thereby making liberal markets a myth. This significantly affects domestic and foreign investment and leads to a slowdown of economic growth, in addition to generating scams which projects a negative image of the country's business environment. Crony capitalism may also grow and evolve into the more extreme manifestation of "oligarchic capitalism". Therefore, the trend towards crony capitalism should be curbed (Sen, 2017).

A comprehensive approach to dealing with the problem is necessary, starting with accounting for reputational cost to crony capitalism, where the government focuses on inclusive growth by encouraging access to quality education, health, and creation of formal jobs and facilitates open forums for consultation. This would not only support income growth of people but also ensure intergenerational mobility in future.

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THE NEW NORMAL: CSR TO MITIGATE INEQUALITIES

BY SIMRAN MANCHANDA,
CLASS OF 2020

The coronavirus pandemic has brought unprecedented shock to lives and livelihoods. It has created a disproportionate impact on some sections of society, and with a forecasted K-shaped recovery, situations are just worsening for the marginalized sections of society. Since inequality prevails not only in terms of income but also vis-à-vis health, nutrition, education, skills, etc., this article talks of how India Inc. is trying to mitigate the crisis through its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

In this situation of deep crisis and uncertainty, CSR has acquired a new sense of responsibility. The announcement to allow funds spent on COVID-19 relief work as CSR spend, is seen as a win-win situation for companies. However, socially responsible companies decided not to just contribute to PM-Cares donations, but also engaged in a wide range of immediate relief packages for the society, and chalked out adaptation and mitigation strategies for ongoing projects with NGO partners.

Nutrition is a common focus area for a lot of companies since it is an important determinant of good quality of life. The pandemic created rampant job losses which lead to heavy dependence on Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana for free ration. While awareness sessions on government programmes are in place as a part of many companies' CSR initiatives, steps can be taken in the direction of creating a self-sufficient community. Nestle turned out to be a pioneer in realizing the importance of micronutrients in diets. By creating 'Agri-nutri' family kitchen gardens as a part of project Vriddhi, Nestle aims at fulfilling

holistic nutrition demands in a cost-effective manner. The initiative aligns with the government promoting farming of perennial vegetables and agroforestry.

Rural development is an important step in bridging the rural-urban divide. ITC Limited has focussed its CSR missions on inclusive grounds with the motto "Sab Saath Badhein". NITI Aayog and ITC partnered to train 15 lakh farmers in 27 aspirational districts, along with the Agricultural Department, in 2018. Due to the pandemic, ITC and district administrations began digital training. Crop training manuals were shared with 3.3 lakh farmers through 4529 village-level WhatsApp groups. Their e-Choupal facility to enhance market linkages for nutritious farm products is an inspiration for other companies to work on.

The pandemic and the consequent lockdown led to the loss of a regular source of earning for many businesses. The COVID-19 crisis has impacted restaurants significantly. It is forecasted that 4 out of 10 restaurants would shut down. Pepsi initiated a campaign #PepsiSaveOurRestaurants, an inclusive program where every time one orders food and adds a beverage to their order, Pepsi will give that many meals to the restaurant workers who have served us. Unilever Indonesia is recharging small to medium enterprises through a new e-route to market, which has led to distributive trade transformation. Stores get vouchers from the app, giving back 100% of Unilever profit to them (for the next few months) in the form of health-protective goods (sanitizers, cleaners, masks, etc).

Educational inequalities have widened due to lack of internet access. According to Pratham, the number of children, youth, and adults not attending schools or educational institutions because of COVID-19 has spiked globally. In India alone, an estimated 300 million learners across all age groups are out of school right now. P&G augmented P&G Shiksha, its education empowerment mission, to make a continuing educational impact despite the pandemic. To spread awareness about hygiene and sanitation, Unilever South Africa had developed and launched Hygienica Castle, a free online website

using gamification to teach the programme's hand washing, toilet, and oral hygiene habits, online. Children log on to complete gamified hygiene lessons and earn rewards for good hygiene behaviours.

'Money belongs to the business, but resources belong to society'. With the deepening crisis, achieving social goals is as important as delivering shareholder value and profitability for the corporates. Adapting and mitigation to the new normal, through CSR strategies, can help companies and communities simultaneously.

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Insightful conversations and motivation:

- Ms Shveta Arora, Nestle India
- Mr Sanjay Khajuria, Nestle India
- Mr Shashank Nair, Nestle India
- Dr Venkat Ram Reddy, SME IIT Jodhpur
- Ms Debika, SM Sehgal Foundation



CAPTURE

STREET LIFE



It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words and I have always believed this. Photography has the power to capture emotions and convey sentiments that words cannot. I remember travelling through the narrow lanes of Chandini Chowk on a rickshaw, on a warm summer evening last year, a time when travelling in groups without masks did not just seem like a happy dream. I also recall looking at the canopy of wires, milling crowds and the old houses on the sides and imagining what it must be like to live there. It is a place full of history, culture and also extreme poverty, sitting next to the erstwhile seat of power, pomp and riches of Mughal India, the Red Fort. The photo of Chandini Chowk highlights the inequalities that exist in our country where the cr-

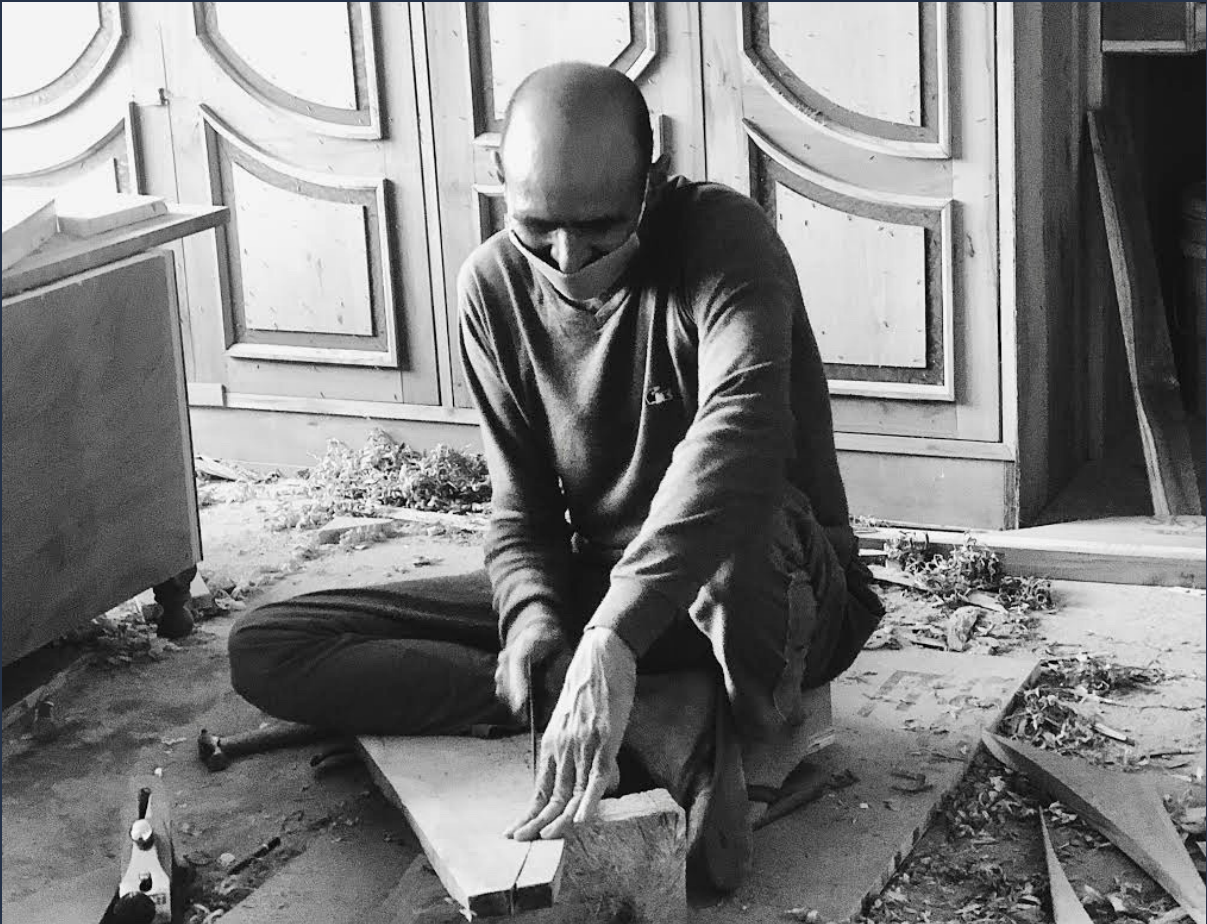
owds of Chandini Chowk are in stark contrast to the privileged residents of Lutyens' Delhi. The inequalities and differences of the past may have reduced, yet in the modern democracies of today, we have both the rich and poor co-existing closely, but leading vastly different lifestyles. This rickshaw ride through Chandini Chowk opened my eyes to the inequalities that are prevalent in our society, reminded me of my privilege and the deep-rooted disparities all around.

ABOUT THE COVER PAGE

BY PAYAL UPRETI







The Prime Minister of India, Mr Narendra Modi, announced a complete nationwide lockdown on March 24, to stop the virus from spreading. It has been a few months since the lockdown and the country still fails to stop the disease from affecting the most vulnerable sections of the society. While many have struggled to keep themselves busy during the lockdown, there has also been a section of people who did not have the option of staying free even amidst a pandemic. These pictures depict the stark reality of our society. A huge section of our society has not had the choice to stay at home or practice social distancing. This is because they do not have enough for themselves and their families. They work on a daily basis, risking their lives, because if they don't, they might have to go to bed with

an empty stomach. Ever since the lockdown, schools and universities have shifted to an online mode. However, Digital India is not yet prepared for Digital Education. The pandemic has successfully exposed the inequalities in our society that continues to exist on the basis of gender, class and caste. These inequalities have seeped into the digital space too. According to statistics only 8% of the Indian households have computer sets with stable internet services. It has also been predicted that due to this there will be an increase in other social woes like child labour, child marriage etc. These statistics do not cover the rural areas of our country where there is a dearth of electricity coverage. We as a country have never gone through something like this before and only by standing together we can fight this crisis.

-Kamun Thakur





While India is one of the fastest growing economies in the world, it is also one which is rampant with inequalities. Economic inequality has been rising sharply in the past few years and is a matter of grave concern. With the onslaught of COVID-19, these inequalities have intensified and the condition of the underprivileged has worsened. Around 250 million people

were living below the poverty line before the pandemic and this number has increased due to people losing their livelihood and sources of income in these trying times. These pictures depict the distress of the underprivileged and shed light on their substandard living conditions, which can be detrimental to their health.

-Payal Upreti

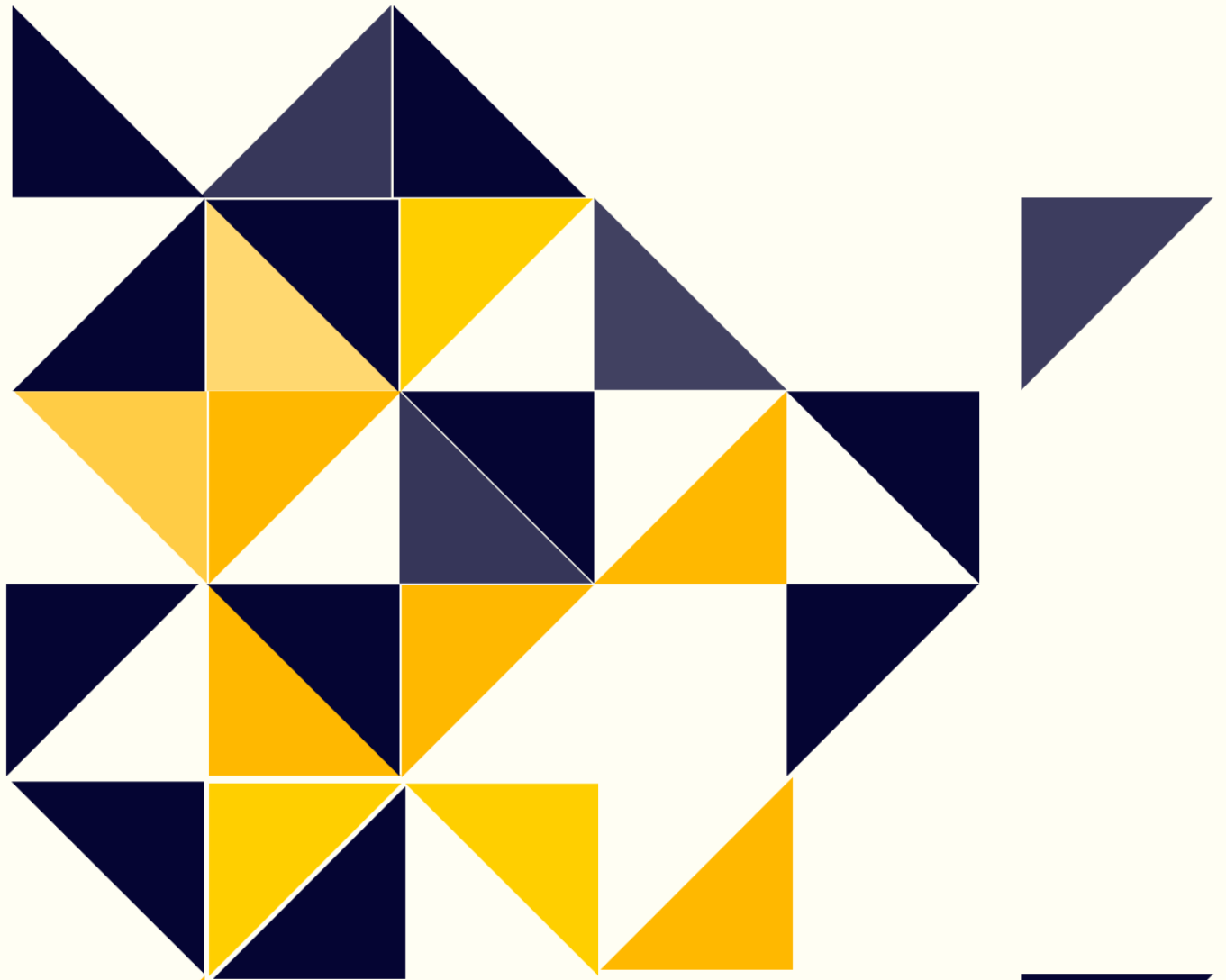




During times of crisis, and now with the COVID-19 pandemic - the informal economy has often been at the receiving end. The coronavirus outbreak has affected countries across the world but what exacerbates the situation is the prevalence of inequality in every society. For the blue-collar working class, social distancing as rallied by government advisories to limit the spread of the virus is a luxury, they cannot afford. The nature of their work and the deep socio-economic divide makes it difficult for them to observe these measures. Staying off work would mean disruption in their income

sources, and furthermore, being cooped up in small spaces with many family members. The working conditions of daily wagers are precarious without masks and other safety measures advised by the health ministry. A large proportion of the formal sector workforce, on the other hand, has been able to practice social distancing and work from the comfort of their homes or workplaces where precautionary measures are followed. The devastation caused by the pandemic is only going to expose and deepen the divide within societies.

-Sharon Rebecca Thomas



articles



BEYOND THE IVORY TOWER: THE DEFICIENT POLITICS AROUND INEQUALITY

BY RIYA GANGWAL

of economic inequality is yet to permeate the deeper membranes of our body politic.

Economists have attempted to identify levels at which the society starts to view the distribution of resources as fair. The Human Development Report, 2019 showed that the rise of inequality in India over the last two decades has been the second-highest, after Russia. A 2019 Oxfam report documented that India's richest 1% is more than four times richer than the lowest 70%.



Cartoon by Tanya Gupta

When the rich and the middle class banged utensils in their balconies, millions of impoverished migrant workers, up until then wheeling the supply chains of our economy, were now reeling under pangs of unforeseen loss of job, income, food, and adequate healthcare. As schools and colleges moved online, a large number of students are strangling with the absence of laptops/smartphones and internet connection. However, the conspicuous truth

While academia holds stellar anecdotes of discussions and debates around inequality, the way this theme manifests itself in mainstream politics is far from dynamic. At its core, the politics of inequality is about how to organise and distribute resources. However, deciding who gets to express preferences is also an active exertion of inequality. Economic status is an important determinant of preferences and the likelihood that they will be articulated

(Jensen and Kersbergen, 2016). Consequently, there exists a close nexus between economic inequality and political stature. This is made further functional and rigorous by the intermediation of systemic structures, like Brahminical norms of casteism and patriarchy, which normatively perpetuate inequalities, and yet, go unchallenged beyond the bounds of the Constitution.

While these structures create single-plane social disparities in choice of occupation, lifestyle, expression and other facets of life, they also enormously guide the inequality of access to resources, and the opportunity to avail them. Such inequality in society dents our frame of economic status and the gradient of participation in the political space. Moreover, inequality increases corruption through material and normative mechanisms. The wealthy have both the greater incentive and more opportunity to indulge in corruption, whereas the poor become more vulnerable to extortion and less able to hold the rich and powerful accountable as inequality increases.

The inadequacy of voices (in the debate around resource distribution) retraces itself in the State's manoeuvres to split public opinion from the absence of equal access and opportunity to avail certain goods and services. For instance, goods like clean air and decent housing are biased against slum-dwellers and economically backward people in their ability to avail it. Many Indians are not able to access proper healthcare – the costs push almost two people into poverty, every second. Alongside, the debate also fails to take into consideration the dynamism of needs. In the case of providing education to reduce inequality, availability of an internet connection has become a pre-requisite. But such dynamic demands hardly ever enter the inequality debate.

The trend of hyper right-wing populism has pumped this decade's politics into merely appealing to the social sentimentality of the masses, shunning out conversations around the extents of disparity that still exist in varying degrees in society. The dichotomous rise of neo-liberal capitalism, coterminous with the growing camaraderie of government and corporate sector, has served to debunk dialogue on inequality and redistribution. The run-up to 2019 Lok Sabha

elections saw the two major national parties locking horns over different versions of income-transfer policy to the poor. And yet, that was not an important plank for the voters. Several past years have experienced continuous demands of reservation from multiple ethnic/social groups. This signifies the tremendous shrinkage of the political landscape to only contain appeasement, and avoid addressing structural issues like lack of investment in health and education infrastructure, social systems of oppression and absent safety net, and the likes.

Tibor Scitovsky, a US economist, asserts three criteria for inequality to become acceptable – (a) If it arises out of merit; (b) If there is equality of opportunity; (c) If there is an improvement in the condition of those at the bottom. The inequality statistics in India convince us of the converse of each criterion. A 2018 Oxfam International report claims that it would take 941 years for a rural minimum wage worker to earn what the top paid executive at a leading Indian garment-company earns in a year. According to the Global Gender Gap Report, 2019, India lost four spots since 2018 to rank at 112th position out of 153 countries, while Nepal, Bangladesh, China and Sri Lanka ranked higher. The National Family Health Survey found that 49.5% of ST population lie in the lowest wealth bracket, as compared to 26.6% of SC, 18.7% of OBC population, and 9.7% of other castes.

The evidence available to indicate striking levels of inequality in India is beyond the scope of what is mentioned in this article. Yet, as another economist points out, a fabricated sense of prosperity or seemingly increasing standards of lifestyle might exist despite falling incomes, and make people ambivalent to the idea of inequality. This is what the relatively cheaply available e-commerce services have done in India. Added to that is the classic problem- solution mismatch that the State offers very convincingly to the voters, disallowing redressal of structural problems. The rural poor's Jan Dhan accounts remaining empty for the longest time was subsided by the big-shot display of government's 'intent' towards eliminating income gap.

The pandemic has laid bare the harshest implications of inequality in India. Multi-layered disparities have been witnessed in terms of

income and employment, regional development, access to healthcare and commodities like internet connectivity. The politics of inequality will continue to remain deficient as long as the voices of the most vulnerable go unheard, and the populace refrains from evolving their demands with changing climes.

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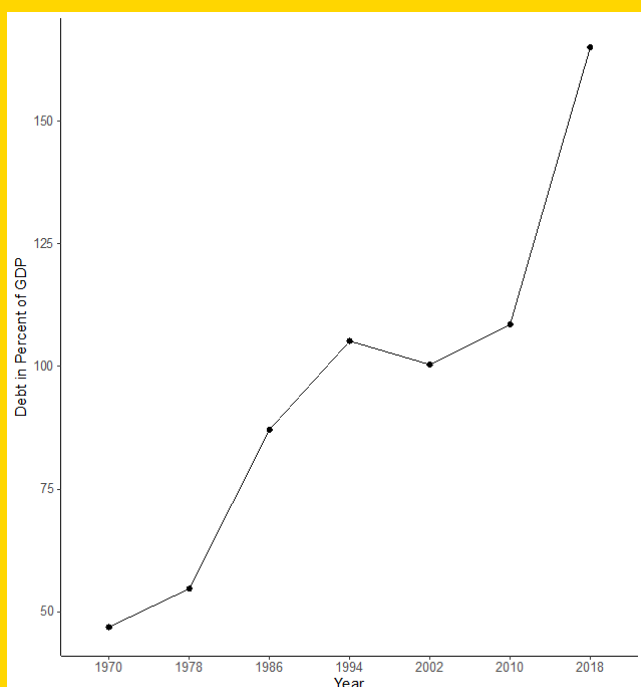
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REEXAMINING THIRD WORLD DEBT

BY PRISHA SAXENA

Global inequality is at the highest than it has ever been.[1] A key facilitator of this burgeoning gap is the developing world debt crisis, in particular, the debt owed by Low-Income Countries (LICs) and Emerging Market and Developing Economies (EMDEs) to institutions, largely based in advanced economies. These debt levels rose dramatically post 1970-71, after the collapse of Bretton Woods accords on international money regulation; with the deregulation of lending and global financial flows, capital became increasingly internationalized. Mountainous accumulation of capital in Western economies started being channeled as debt to third-world economies, primarily through the Bretton Woods Institutes, i.e., the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).



Figure*: Debt in EMDEs

Source: International Monetary Fund, World Bank

These twin intergovernmental institutions are the primary architects of the present-day international economic order. Late 20th century onwards, the IMF has proactively provided developing economies with enormous amounts of *caveated* loans. Working on neoclassical assumptions, these institutions sponsor neoliberal policies as a price for assistance, that coax economies to incorporate huge cutbacks in public spending and employment, deregulation, and deter protectionism. These arm-twisting stipulations do fuel growth in impoverished economies but fail to mitigate inequalities or poverty.[2] Conceivably, the policy prescriptions that accompany cross-border credit have been documented to predominantly benefit transnational capitalist firms, global banks and interests of advanced economies.[3]

Bearing this in mind, numerous scholars have cited the extension of financial 'assistance' to third world countries as an extension of Western Imperialism, a neocolonial transgression.[4] It has become a novel way of retaining/gaining political clout and financial power without the need of securing territorial control. Through WB and IMF, western economies have set in motion a financial low-intensity conflict against the Global South.[5]

Perhaps the earliest and most disquieting example of this colonial phenomenon is the case of the Republic of Haiti, which was placed under permanent debt peonage to France[6] in 1825, after defeating Napoleon's forces in 1804. The nation, founded by former plantation slaves, was coaxed into paying 150 million francs (equivalent to USD 18 billion) as 'reparations' to France for their loss of slaves and a slave colony. Under international pressure, the newly independent state was forced to repay this 'Independence Debt', which irreparably wrecked the Haitian economy.

Only with the benefit of hindsight, can we observe and condemn the injustice and mal intent of this phenomenon. It seems as if the debt was a political tactic with no real economic backing, fabricated out of thin air,

to preserve control over and continue the exploitation of a former colony.

Thus, at this juncture, it is imperative that we make a conscientious effort to deconstruct and reexamine the entire concept of debt. A universally accepted disposition is that the statement, 'Debt *has* to be paid back' is economic in nature and is held up by mercantile doctrines. However, upon recontextualizing the concept, we can infer that the repayment of debt is rather an issue of morality than economics. Ideas of responsibility, diligence are first and foremost associated with morality. "*After all, isn't paying one's debts what morality is supposed to be all about? Giving people what is due them.*"[6]

Thinking of debt as a moral construct rather than economic is a radical departure from the status quo; debt is the animating spirit of the present global capitalist economic order. It is the central issue populating both domestic as well as international politics. And yet, debt cannot be defined in unmoving, precise terms, and this ambiguity, is in fact, what is the basis of its power. Historically, debt has been defined subjectively across different contexts, where power asymmetry exists between actors. All class war can be boiled down to a conflict between creditors and debtors. This is evidenced by our contemporary moral and religious language; words like 'reckoning', 'redemption', 'forgiveness' etc., all can be traced back to ancient finance [6]. Thus, the matter of what one owes to whom has been central in shaping the social order, as we know it.

Reexamining debt in its murky historical and contemporary socio-political context, has evoked a global movement that calls for Debt Jubilee for the Global South. The etymology of the word, 'Jubilee' can be traced back to The Old Testament, where it signified notions of emancipation and injunction. In the present day, in conjunction with debt, the word refers to the unconditional cancellation/clearance of debt from public records. One of the largest organizations at the helm of this global movement is the Jubilee Debt Campaign. Between 2000 and 2015, the charity achieved the cancellation of \$13 billion worth of debt for developing countries.

The movement for Debt Jubilee has gained substantial traction in recent times vis-à-vis combating the recessionary effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic looming above.[9, 10] From being a niche, radical concept, it has now entered the mainstream consciousness. Such pluralistic and heterodox ideas have inevitably and increasingly started trickling into popular relevance, unsettling the conventionality of our current political economy. It is imperative we broaden our perspective and allow ourselves to look beyond and question what we take as a given.

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*Figure** Collated data from *Global Waves of Debt (2020)*[7] used. Graph created using R[8] software.

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ON THE ETHICS OF ETHICAL CAPITALISM

BY ARUNIMA SRIVASTAVA

The union of the terms 'ethical' and 'capitalism' seems to produce a juxtaposition so that the concept of 'ethical capitalism' appears purely notional at a glance albeit it is not so at closer scrutiny. Indeed, the discourse questioning the ethics of capitalism gained traction after the Global Financial Crisis in 2008 and, in 2014, an open forum was conducted at the World Economic Forum in Davos on the motion, 'Ethical Capitalism - Worth a Try?'. The name and particularly the need to attach the adjective 'ethical' to the term 'capitalism' concretizes the belief that the form of capitalism prevalent in most countries is innately unethical.

'Capitalism' refers to an economic model wherein the modes of production are privately owned. It is a free-market system that is characterized by economic freedom to earn and collect wealth; central to it is the concept of Homo Economicus, that is, a human who is intensely rational and driven with the motivation of maximizing personal gains. Capitalism has acquired various forms and undergone several changes since its inception in the 18th Century; from Mercantilism, Keynesianism, Industrialism to its present variation, Neoliberalism (Wolfe, 1981). After the conclusion of the Cold War and the subsequent disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, most of the developing countries tacitly adopted the capitalist ideology of the United States economy. During the 1990s, the Indian economy observed a noticeable shift from the socialist form of economic planning witnessed in the 1970s to adopting free-market principles. However, with increasing adherence to free-market principles, inequality in India experienced a sharp rise. For example, there was a rise in inequality in

household consumption in India, as shown in the tables below.

Rural			
Year	Gini Coefficient	share in consumption expenditure (%)	
		Bottom 30% population	Top 30% population
1972-73	0.302	15.0	50.9
1977-78	0.337	14.3	53.9
1983	0.298	15.2	50.9
1987-88	0.291	15.8	50.4
1993-94	0.281	16.0	49.9
1999-00	0.260	16.7	48.3
2004-05	0.297	15.5	51.6

Table: Household consumption inequality trends in rural areas of India
Source: 61st Round of NSS

urban		
Gini Coefficient	share in consumption expenditure (%)	
	Bottom 30% population	Top 30% population
0.341	13.9	54.3
0.345	13.5	54.9
0.330	13.9	53.7
0.352	13.4	55.3
0.340	13.6	54.7
0.343	13.4	54.7
0.373	12.4	56.9

Table: Household consumption inequality trends in urban areas of India
Source: 61st Round of NSS

In the rural areas, the Gini coefficient for household consumption expenditure (that is a measure of inequality) increased from 0.281 in 1993-94 to 0.297 in 2004-05, while in the urban areas, the value increased from 0.340 to 0.373 in the given time period.

The close links between the rise of capitalism and increasing economic and social inequality became strikingly evident after the Global Financial Crisis; that capitalism was unethical became increasingly apparent. The largely unethical attribute of capitalism is the burgeoning inequality that is resultant. In this context, the counter-narrative to the neoliberal form



Cartoon by
Tanya Gupta

of capitalism developed in the 1970s is considered to be ethical capitalism. An article titled 'Capitalism needs an ethical reboot' that appeared in a national daily espouses the acceptance of this concept by the Indian economy. However, any discourse surrounding the promotion of ethical capitalism in India must first address how ethical, if at all, is ethical capitalism?

In many ways, manifestations of ethical capitalism have always been there in the Indian economy. The existence of corporate NGOs or the presence of regulatory features such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) are examples of measures taken to render capitalism ethical. Capitalism as an ethical economic philosophy was also countenanced and propagated by M.K. Gandhi (Roy, 2017). Roy (2017) cites extracts from Gandhi's essay, Equal Distribution (1940), to substantiate the argument. According to Gandhi, the persons in possession of copious wealth are the "guardians of the poor" and will utilize only a portion of wealth, as per their personal needs. They will act as benefactors for the rest of the society by allowing the latter to use the remainder of their wealth. As such, "honesty on part of the trustee is assumed". To enable such concentration of wealth, he argued that "the rich cannot accumulate wealth without the co-operation of the poor in society".

With this understanding, the responsibility of rendering capitalism ethical is at the hands of those who own capital and the ability to create wealth. Bisanz (2014) validates this claim by maintaining that the outcomes of capitalism get determined by the people who practice it. An

analysis of CSR laws and the status of corporate NGOs in India, however, reveals that their effects on reducing inequality are marginal.

The Companies Act, 2013, requires that firms sized above a threshold level spend 2% of their net profits on CSR projects. Karnani (2016) claims that expenditure on CSR projects is not a measurement of societal welfare. A serious issue arises out of an absence of definition around the various schedules for CSR expenditures; while most of the CSR spending is earmarked for combating diseases and promotion of education, a limited amount is designated for reducing inequality. Additionally, CSR spending is determined arbitrarily and may not go to democratically prioritized sectors. There is also evidence that suggests that through CSR activities, firms may increase their profits by brand building and employee engagement (Karnani, 2016). Fauset (2006) says that CSR only increases the company's access to capital by

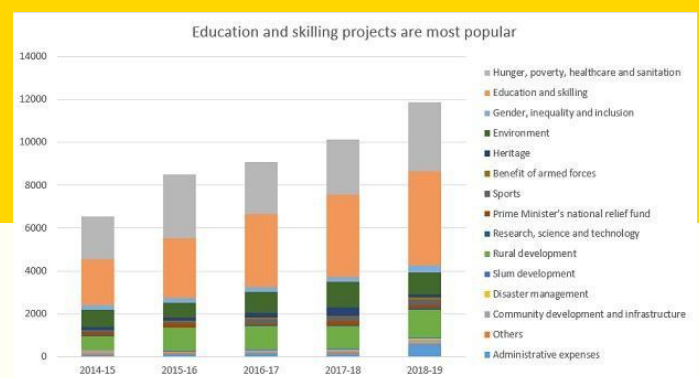


Chart showing CSR expenditure in various sectors
Image Source: Mampatta (2019)

gaining public trust.

Similar to the shortcomings of CSR laws in India are the failings of Corporate NGOs in reducing inequality. Indeed, reports suggest that a close nexus between corporate NGOs and companies facilitates malpractices such as tax evasion and money laundering as donations to NGOs receive substantial tax exemptions. Moreover, humanitarian causes of mitigating inequalities and empowering marginalized communities are integral to the conceptualization of an NGO. These objectives may get deemphasized after corporatization.

The example of BRAC (formerly known as the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee) shows how the corporatization of NGOs can precipitate adverse impacts. Now the world's largest non-governmental development organization, BRAC increasingly resembles a corporate giant vis-a-vis the executive power structure (Muhammad, 2018). Muhammad (2018) also explains that BRAC represents a new phase in the NGO model, viz. the corporatization of NGOs to effectively link big corporates to the poor and provide a market for the former.

Measures taken to lessen inequality and render capitalism ethical in India are rooted in neoliberal ideology and fall short of mitigating adverse impacts of burgeoning inequality. As author Arundhati Roy points out, corporate philanthropy in the West is a tool for perpetuating global capitalism (Deo, 2019). Indeed, the concept of ethical capitalism, though benign, merely advances the consolidation of corporate power. Despite the significant expansion of the Indian economy over the years, income and wealth inequality has been consistently rising; hinting at a lack of initiative to redistribute the gains accruing from growth. Instead of inadequate efforts aimed at disguising the veritable problem, there is a need for the government to actively take action to fill the glaring gap left by capitalism in the Indian economy.

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WOMEN AND WORK IN INDIA

BY PAYAL UPRETI

India has enjoyed high economic growth and rapid urbanisation since the early 1990s, which has led to a dramatic improvement in standards of living and employment opportunities for both men and women. This has also resulted in greater labour force participation, which enhances the growth rate of a country and leads to overall socio-economic development. A number of policies have also been implemented to generate higher employment but in spite of these policies and economic liberalization, the female labour force participation has remained below the optimal level and their ability to access quality occupational opportunities remains precarious.

Female labour force participation (FLFP) is defined as the section of working female population belonging to the ages of 15-64 who are actively seeking employment or are employed. FLFP is measured by calculating the female labour force participation rate. This rate is derived by dividing the number of females in the labour force by the total number of females in the working age population. It gives us an idea about the size of female labour supply. Since the productivity levels of women are at par with that of men, having a higher supply of female labour and their engagement in the economy will lead to higher economic growth and increase the utilization of human potential. FLFP not only leads to development but also empowers the women and reduces the gender



Cartoon by Stefiya Thomas

disparities. The participation of women in an economy is affected by a number of socio-economic factors and it has been found that FLFP rates have increased dramatically in developed countries in recent years due to gender-focused policies. It is imperative for policy makers to understand the factors that influence a women's decision to join the working population and come up with measures to promote higher participation.

In India, there is a distinct difference between male labour force participation and female labour force participation. India's FLFP in 1990 was 30.3% and it fell to 20.5% in 2019 while the MLFP in 2019 was at a staggering 76.08%. According to World

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Economic Forum's economic gender gap index, India has ranked 149th in 2020 in terms of its economic participation and employment opportunities. FLFP rates in India have remained low even with increase in education and this remains a matter of concern, which has to be addressed in earnest. To make this distinction clear, let us examine the size of the labour force for both men and women in the past decade. For the period of 1999-2005, female labour force increased by 26.5 million whereas the male labour force increased by 35.2 million workers. During 2005-2010, the size of female labour force decreased by 21.7 million workers while male labour force continuously increased by another 24.3 million. There was an additional increase of 12.3 million male workers from 2010-2012. While for their female counterparts, there was only a 2 million increase. In 2013, International Labour Organisation ranked India 121 out of 131 countries in terms of female labour force participation with the second lowest FLFP rates in all of South Asia.

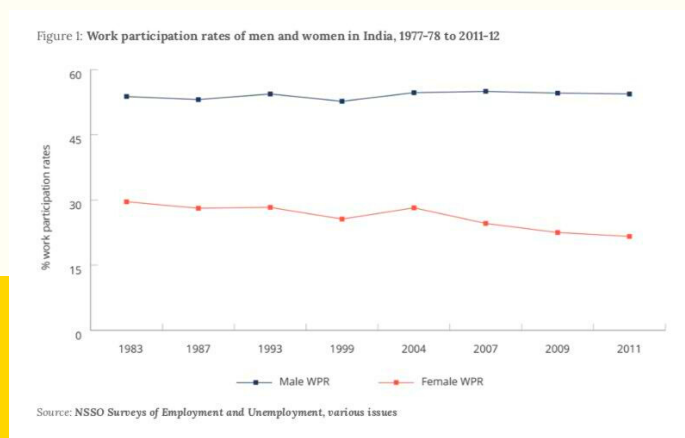


Figure: Work participation rates of men and women in India, 1977-78 to 2011-12

Image Source: Mondal et al. (2018)

Female labour force participation in India has multiple determinants and it is important to understand all the socio-economic factors in order to find the reasons behind the low rates of FLFP and the recent downslide. India is a country which is more rigidly bound to traditional roles, where men are supposed to be the breadwinners and women are supposed to complete household chores. In olden times, FLFP was very low due to these stringent roles placed by society and they were stricter for rural areas. With increase in education and widespread awareness, these roles

Figure 6: Educational profile of labor force participation for men and women.

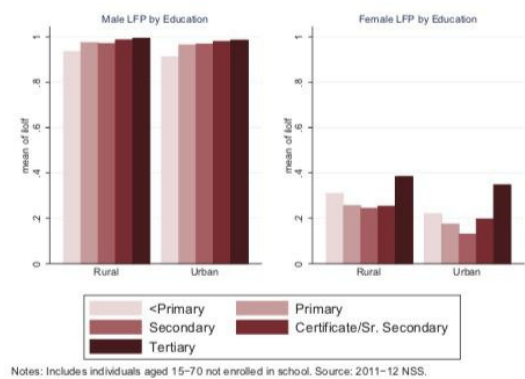


Figure: Educational profile of labor force participation for men and women

Image Source: Mondal et al. (2018)

have become more fluid and women enjoy greater employment freedom and opportunities. Educational qualification, household composition, marital status, childbirth, family income, employment related policies and social classification are some of the main contributors to the fluctuation in rates. Workplace atmosphere, high number of sexual harassment incidents, and high wage disparity also demotivate women and act as barriers for them.

In recent years, we have seen a decline in FLFP in India and it is important to understand the reasons behind this decline since it might worsen the status of women in India. The rate of decline is higher for rural women than that of their urban counterparts. Most rural females were engaged in agricultural work, however, with the decline in employment in the agricultural sector and decrease in the size of land holdings, there has been a sharp decline in the demand for agricultural wage labour. Apart from this, increase in educational qualification has shifted the aspirations of most of them from unpaid agricultural work on family farms to more formal paid work. However, this shift has not been accompanied by an increase in the opportunities for women in the formal sector and thus quite a few women, despite having the knowledge and skills required, are left with no work. Most of the salaried jobs are accessible with higher levels of education and thus women with only primary or secondary levels of education are left unemployed.

Females in rural areas are more inclined to join the



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labour force to help decrease the financial burden on their families and also because female education is not given as much importance in rural areas. It has been seen that education has a strong relation with FLFP and even though education empowers women and opens up more job opportunities, the creation of such job opportunities has not happened at proportionate rates for highly educated women. It has been observed that fields with more female – friendly policies have a higher representation. Apart from not having enough options, there is also the issue of lack of access to such opportunities. Household composition has a skewed U-shaped relationship with FLFP. At first, with an increase in number of household members, FLFP increases to help ease the financial burden on the male counterpart but with a further increase in the number of members, there is a decrease in FLFP. This is because women are forced to drop out of work to focus on the increased household activities. Social classification is widely prevalent in India and it has been observed that women belonging to marginalized groups are more inclined to join the labour force while women belonging to families with higher income groups are less inclined to join the labour force.

Figure 7: Age profile of labor force participation among women by geographic location.

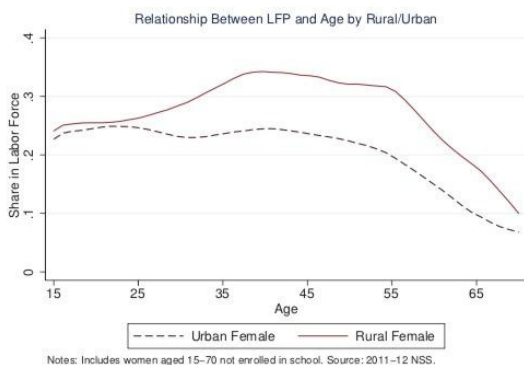


Figure: Age profile of labor force participation among women by geographic location
Image Source: Mondal et al. (2018)

There is an enormous difference in the wages of male and female workers and this disparity has only increased with the country's economic growth. Since female workers are employed in less skilled work with low incomes, they are more

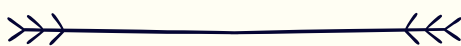
susceptible to wage exploitation. Studies have shown that women are more likely to perform unpaid work. This not only leads to lower involvement in paid work but also lowers the social valuation of work done by them and lower reservation wages. The manufacturing industry has showed some positive improvements in recent years with the wages of female workers increasing but there has been a significant decline in the overall employment of women in the sectors.

There is an urgent requirement for female friendly policies to promote their participation in the labour force. Education and vocational training are necessary but not sufficient conditions for women to get employed. It is not only important to focus on creating more opportunities for women but it is equally important to ensure that such opportunities are easily accessible. Safe public transport and workplaces, women-friendly maternity policy and leave would be a step in the right direction and help bring more women to the labour force. The government should come up with policies that focus on both the demand and supply side of female labour force. The Indian Economy can be fuelled and boosted by increasing the participation of women, which will ensure the rise of a resurgent and confident India.

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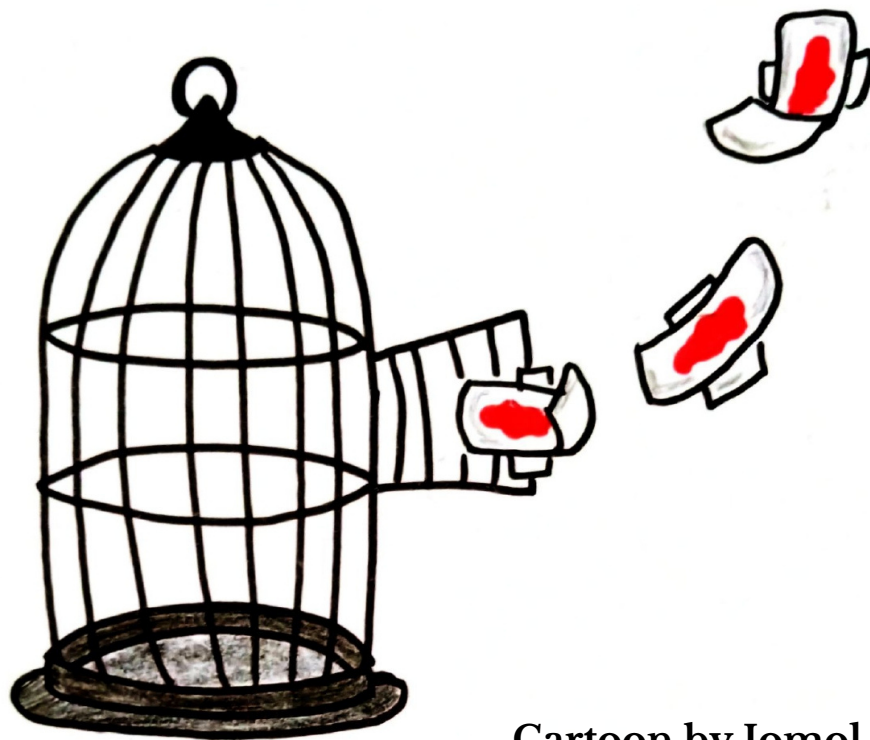
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THE ECONOMICS BEHIND MENSTRUAL LEAVE POLICY

BY APARAAJITA

for period leave policy rests on the argument of equity for men and women in the workplace, by accepting their genuine biological needs and differences. It is well-documented that menstruators experience a wide range of health complications and pain during their periods, which can get extremely severe for people with chronic conditions like Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) and endometriosis. While period leave rightfully allows menstruators to



Cartoon by Jomol Johnson

(Note- The Contrarian upholds and encourages inclusivity and has used the term 'menstruators' wherever possible, to recognise that not all people who menstruate are women, and that not all women menstruate. Unfortunately though, due to the traditional association of the phenomenon of menstruation with cis-women, there is a lack of data on experiences of trans and enby people, which led to the facts in this article being restricted to mostly cis-women).

The recent announcement by an Indian unicorn granting ten days of special paid period leave to all its menstruating employees has once again sparked the debate on mandatory menstrual leave policy, polarising even the group it was meant to appease (Al Jazeera, 2020). The support

rest during their monthly cycle, many laud the policy for normalizing and destigmatizing menstruation too. However, for the period leave policy to attain its intended objectives, one cannot ignore the economics behind it.

The menstrual leave policy first came into effect just after the First World War in Communist Russia. However, women asked for the policy to be stopped after five years as it turned out that employers started favouring the 'cheaper' and 'more reliable' male workers (Ilić, 1996). Even in India, the concept of menstrual leaves isn't new. Since 1992, the women staff at Bihar government offices and services can avail two days of extra leaves owing to 'biological reasons' (Krishnan, 2017). It was only up till a

few years back that a private media company in Mumbai introduced 'Period leaves' and started addressing it for what it is (Krishnan, 2017). As some of the bigger private employers have started accepting the purpose of period leaves, the question remains if others would be okay with extending extra leaves to menstruators and yet being unbiased in the hiring process. If menstrual leave is structured like maternity leave, putting the onus on employers for financing the leave, it threatens to increase the cost of hiring menstruators and creating a bias against them. The Maternity Bill Amendment which came into effect from 2017 increased the paid maternity leave available for women workers from the then-existing 12 weeks to 26 weeks, as well as made it mandatory for organizations with at least 50 employees to provide a crèche facility for its working mother employees (The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017). Surveying the impact of these progressive looking provisions, TeamLease services found that 66% of all the employers will take into cognizance these additional costs while hiring women and slightly more than a quarter of all respondents expressly admitted that they would prefer hiring male candidates as employees (TeamLease report, 2018). Similarly, paid period leave can exacerbate this situation, questioning the reliability of menstruating employees and discriminating against them in the promotion and hiring process. It gives companies policy grounds to offer lower in-hand salaries to trans people and females, justifying that the cost to company for all employees should be equal.

Further, such gender-specific policies can keep women confined to the informal sector and contractual jobs where they won't be liable to many of these employee benefits. About 55% of urban working women were in regular, salaried employment in 2018-19 (Bharti, Nikore, 2020). Of these, 71% had no written job contract, and 51% were not eligible for paid leave (Bharti, Nikore, 2020). About 90% of the women who work in the informal sector will be unaffected by this provision (Bonnet, Vanek, Chen, 2019). For menstruators employed informally as labourers, especially trans people, it would be a task to prove that they experience pain that renders them incapable of work. There isn't much evidence to support the argument that Menstrual leave policies help in achieving higher gender

equity. Japan implemented a national menstrual leave policy soon after the Second World War and recently ranked 121, on the World Economic Forum's "Global Gender Gap Report 2020" compared to countries with lower GDPs like Costa Rica which ranked 13 (World Economic Forum, 2020).

Therefore, the solution lies in striking a balance between providing menstruators a safe space to seek period leave and ensuring no grey area that could be privy to discrimination at the workplace for opting for menstrual leave. A good alternative would be increasing the number of sick leaves for both men and women. Research has shown that "paid sick leave policies are associated with economic benefits for employers, specifically in terms of improved employee productivity, reduced turnover and lower associated hiring and training costs, as well as improved employee morale and loyalty" (A.Schliwen, 2011). The Covid-19 pandemic has brought about a middle path solution in "remote-working". In industries and services where employees can work from home, more such days can be allotted to professionals. Rather than just giving menstruators leaves to deal with their periods at home, employers should focus on providing adequate waste disposal, menstrual products, restrooms, and breaks to its menstruating employees. The minimum standard of working conditions and labour rights should be legislated for factories and sweatshop labourers.

In a world where menstruators are still conscious about hiding their period supplies from the male gaze, periods can only be normalized when employers make offices and institutions period-friendly. Period leave can give corporations an easy way out, by avoiding investment in their employees' well-being and a conducive workplace, blaming the lack thereof on the complexity of the menstruation biology. Instead providing access to effective treatment through emergency period supplies and encouraging medical support through insurance covers for consultations can help raise awareness and improve menstrual health drastically.

While the moral intention behind menstrual leaves cannot be questioned, it is an easy solution for corporations with highly probable unintended economic consequences against



menstruators. As this move is welcomed, we must keep working towards more sustainable and intersectional solutions that account for not just relief-based support but a holistic effort to ensure equity and inclusivity for all social classes and genders, along with the focus on a healthier workforce.

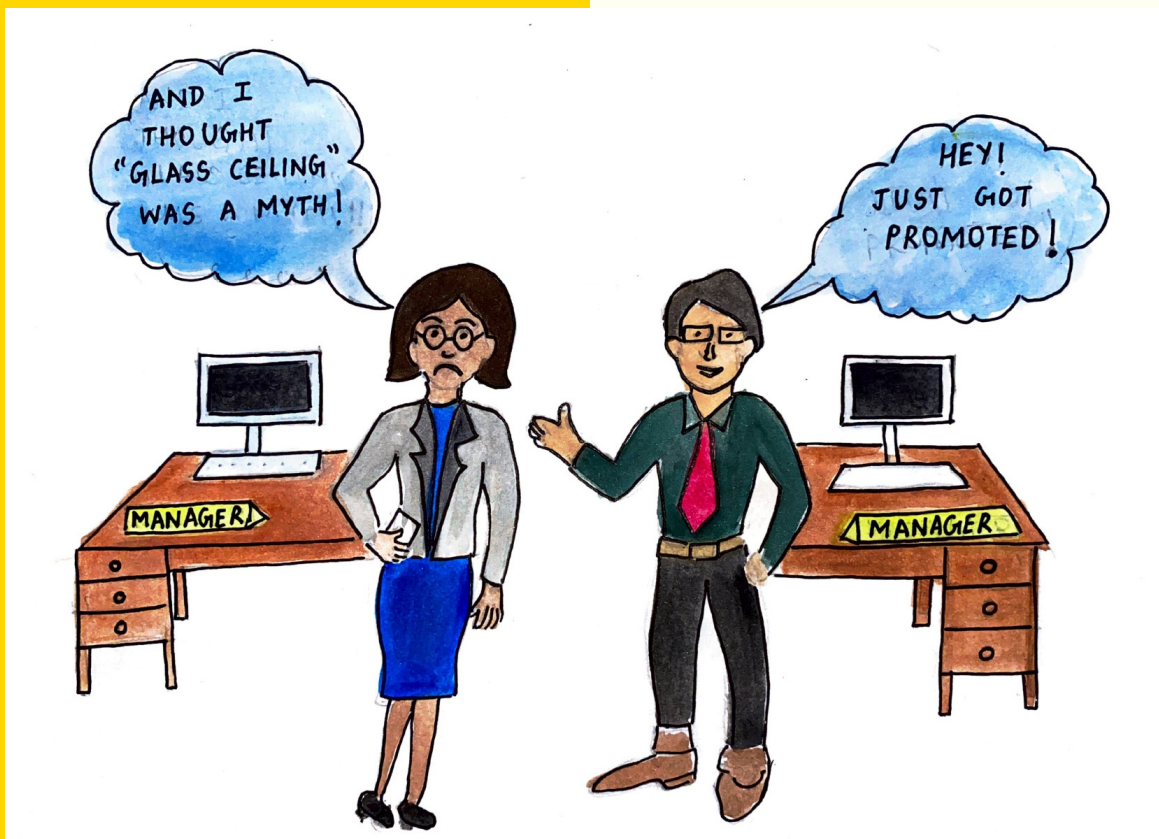
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RELIGION AND GENDER: REVIEWING INEQUALITY IN THE SOCIAL MILIEU

BY ARPITA MARY
ABRAHAM

socioeconomic and political direction of societies. In some societies, religion can be a pertinent political factor than say variables like race or ethnicity. Gender inequality, in like manner, is important for social and economic progress and varies from region to region. It is vastly influenced by institutional norms, as well as culture and tradition, both largely decided by religion. Many world religions maintain male social dominance within societal structures. Kuznets (1955) had suggested an inverted-U relationship between economic growth and inequality, i.e., some increase in inequality is inevitable during the early stages of economic development. But inequality is also harmful to growth in the long run, especially in democratic political environments[1]. Thus, it becomes essential to understand these intersections among



Cartoon by Nicole Srishti Basile

Religion, the world's oldest belief system, plays an important role in cultural, political and economic spheres. It is deeply rooted in people's experiences and can alter the

multiple systems of oppression that work in tandem, and to identify sources of these problems to interpret inequality.

Historically, Muslims in India have had lower average earnings than people of other religious denominations. In 1987, the average earnings of Muslims and other non-Hindus were 77.5 per cent and 111.35 per cent, respectively, of the average earnings of Hindus. In 1999, the corresponding figures were 75 per cent and 113.81 per cent[2]. Similar variation is also noted in educational attainment and women's labour force participation. People in the highest-earning deciles are professionals who are relatively few in number, such that everyone belonging to that education cohort enjoys a high return on their education, irrespective of caste or religion. On the other hand, people in the lowest income groups have lower education levels and compete for jobs that do not require specific skills. Thus, they have low earnings, which do not vary significantly with religion or caste. However, individuals working at intermediate levels (formal or quasi-formal enterprises) have higher earnings differentials and have a substantial difference in access to education. This high earnings differential has been noticed in factors like religion and caste[3].

While analysing gender pay gaps, it is also essential to understand the social and religious dimensions. The neo-liberal belief, based on the logic of human capital theory, argues that the gender wage gap exists because of differences in education levels, technical skills and work experience. However, it is known that gender-based wage discrimination exists even among people with similar education levels. Due to the wage gap, women earn less as compared to men and thus, households that rely primarily on female earners tend to be poorer. India ranks 108th on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index of 2018, 10 ranks below its 2006 level and behind its neighbours, Bangladesh and China. There is a considerable gender-based wage differential in the Indian labour market. This gender wage gap has significantly reduced over the years. The rate of return of education is higher among women, but these premiums have declined over time, irrespective of social or religious group[4].

Health outcomes, especially with respect to life expectancy and mortality, can depend on the existence of "a social gradient"- a phenomenon whereby people who are less advantaged in terms

of socio-economic position have worse health outcomes than those who are more advantaged. In a paper by Vani Borooah, a marked difference was found among religious groups in terms of mean and median ages at death. The mean age at death for OBC Muslims was 43.4 years, and 43.8 years for non-OBC Muslims. Compared to this, the mean age at death was 57.5 years for Sikhs and non-ST Christians, 54.2 years for Hindus, 49.4 years for ST Christians and 48.4 years for non-Muslim OBC. A similar trend was noticed in the pre and postnatal care received by married women below 50 years of age. Even after controlling for variables like education levels and the economic position of the women's households, the social groups that these women belonged to had a significant effect on their probabilities of receiving prenatal care. Compared to Hindus (the control group), ST Christians, OBC Muslims, non-OBC Muslims were less likely to receive prenatal care by, respectively, 11.5, 8.8, and 4.3 points and non-ST Christians were more likely to receive prenatal care by 16.3 points. **This shows that being at the bottom of the social ladder can increase risks of suffering premature death, lack of treatment and care, and poor health.**

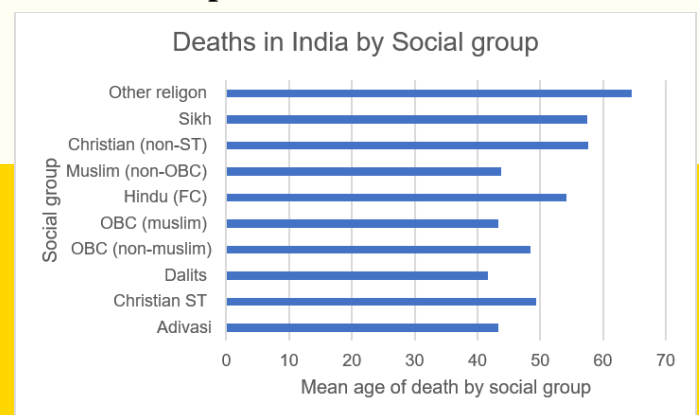


Figure: Deaths in India by social group
Source: Borooah (2010)

The intersection of religion and gender can be considered as a separate social dimension in the sense that the entrenched mindset of treating women as an expensive (dowry systems) and uneconomical commodity (concerning non-income generating, household work) within families leads to double oppression. Even when certain religious scriptures allow women the right to hold and inherit property or to have the right to divorce a husband, the application of these norms can be uncertain because of cultural aspects specific to each country or region. The

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advancement of technology and capitalism have only changed certain practices instead of reversing them. For instance, female infanticide, with the advancement of technology has changed into female foeticide. Similarly, capitalism strengthens the practice of patriarchy as wealth accumulates in the hands of the male member of the household.

Even the practice of deforestation in the name of 'development' deteriorates the life conditions of Adivasis in general and adds to the vulnerability of women. This is because it increases the working hours of women who are engaged in collecting firewood (a household activity) and also because the mechanisation process has deskilled women more than men.[5]

Religion and gender are inherently tied to the social and economic development of any country. These issues have been used by political parties to advance vote-bank politics in many instances. But whether these policies have significantly helped to improve conditions for women, is still a concern. Movements or policies that have been introduced in India for reducing gender inequality target only the most observable, material parts of gender disparity, while ignoring the patriarchal structures that cause these inequalities[6]. Creating gender-blind policies, ignoring differential requirements especially in multiple systems of oppression and not gender mainstreaming policies adds to the dilemma of gender and religion-based discrimination in the labour market.

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UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITIES: EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

BY PARIDHI PURI

The Indian Education system, arrested by loopholes of policy – is a manifestation of burgeoning class divide. Despite being relegated as the route to development and a mechanism for social upliftment of the poor and marginalised, the Education System in India has reproduced the same inequalities that surrounds our social and economic lives. The richest 5% in urban India spend 29 times more on education than the households in the



Cartoon by Nicole Srishti Basile

The importance of good quality, universal education cannot be underscored in any economy. Governments need to be committed and proactive in ensuring relevant and robust policy framework that would engage in the progress of human resource development. This article, therefore, refers to the key aspects of inequality in the education system - brought about by lack of universal and equitable access, challenges of privatisation and the larger role that the notion of merit plays in deepening caste and gender biases in the education system.

middle of the rural income distribution. With the delusion of 'merit' driving its tenets, it's no wonder that educational inequalities have made some powerful enough to amass wealth and resources, while dictating economic politics to suit their status quo.

A working paper from Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE) dated December 2017 assessed the Indian board examination papers along the following lines: "In India, higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) were more or less absent and the emphasis

was very much on recall of very precise rote-learned knowledge.” This culminates in the system churning out graduates that are deemed unemployable in the job market, further deepening the class divide that traditionally good education seeks to narrow, with promise of skills and opportunities. With dwindling growth rate, it's no wonder that lack of proportionate emphasis on education as the cornerstone of development strategy has led to this situation.

INEQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

The richest 5% in urban India spend 29 times more on education than households in the middle of the rural income distribution

Monthly per capita expenditure on education (in Rs)		
	Rural	Urban
Poorest 5%	7.54	16.32
5-10%	10.88	25.26
10-20%	14.88	37.59
20-30%	19.66	53.92
30-40%	22.45	72.01
40-50%	28.35	100.84
50-60%	31.47	125.49
60-70%	40.82	158.01
70-80%	54.28	220.37
80-90%	79.09	326.22
90-95%	121.49	491.57
Richest 5%	277.5	908.12

Source: NSSO

Image source:

<https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/DuRPMP SqaaqCDLoNMgRabL/The-class-divide-in-Indian-education-system.html>

The highlights of the latest Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) reaffirm the callousness of the system: “After almost eight years of schooling, only 43% of 14-18-year-olds could perform simple division; about less than half couldn’t calculate in kilograms; more than 40% couldn’t differentiate between hours and minutes in a clock; and 46% didn’t know the capital of India.”

A troublesome highlight of the National Education Policy (NEP) is the thrust towards private sector entities to finance public education, at almost all levels: school, higher, research technical, vocational, and innovation. This is categorically bad for marginalised students, who depend on the promise of equitable public institutions to access higher education in the first place. This might result in a policy affirmation aimed at materialization of all kinds of student loans making it specifically difficult for students belonging to socio-economically disadvantaged groups to repay - thus percolating a vicious cycle of indebtedness, poverty and vulnerability. (Jha and Parvati, 2020).

Due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the barriers that constrained students earlier to access education have been exacerbated and are compounded by infrastructural challenges of electricity and internet penetration. (Jha and Ghatak 2020) This does not bode well for the centre’s vision to further the universality of education throughout the country, even with private schools’ lack of fee concessions and technological help for Economically Weaker Section (EWS) children. In the words of Economist Prabhat Patnaik, “*The competition presupposes commoditisation. The ‘quality’ that is supposed to get better through ‘competition’ in such a world where education is transformed into a commodity.*”

The disparity in education between boys and girls is clearly visible in India’s literacy rates – 82% of boys are literate while only 65% of girls can read and write, according to the Census of India in 2011. This inequality between genders is more pronounced among lower-income families. According to a study carried out by AC Nielsen in collaboration with NGO Plan India, 23% of girls in India leave school once they hit puberty. The girls who continue their education miss as many as 50 school days each year as a result of menstruation.

Inequality by caste is a major phenomenon in India – and it is pervasive in the education sector too. The enrolment ratios among both the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) communities are low and still significant inequalities persist between scheduled and non-scheduled population groups (Karak 2016). Systemic denial of education in rural areas to massive bullying and mental torment to students

from Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi (DBA) communities is one of the most shameful precept in the educational macrocosm of the nation. The suicide of university students including Fathima Lateef is a result of harassment and persecution of minorities in our country, where Islamophobia is rampant- while that of Rohit Vemula and Rajni Krish, both belonging to the Dalit community—is a structural failure caused due to the lack of government aid in affirming the lives and struggles of marginalised university students.

The investment in education of the economically weaker sections yield economic returns that are estimated to be higher than returns to their counterparts – which implies that inequalities in education would cause huge losses in national output. Since the total equity gains might exceed the losses in efficiency, inclusive strategies that contribute to equity should be viewed favourably not only from the perspective of social justice, but also with regard to economic well-being. (Patnaik, 2012).

The echo of Article 41 of the Constitution, "State shall, within limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing right to work, to education" is resounding in these times - it's extremely important to safeguard every citizen's right to education. Furthermore, it is critical to provide for equitable access of the highest quality education to all learners, irrespective of social or economic backgrounds. We've a long road to traverse, in this regard.

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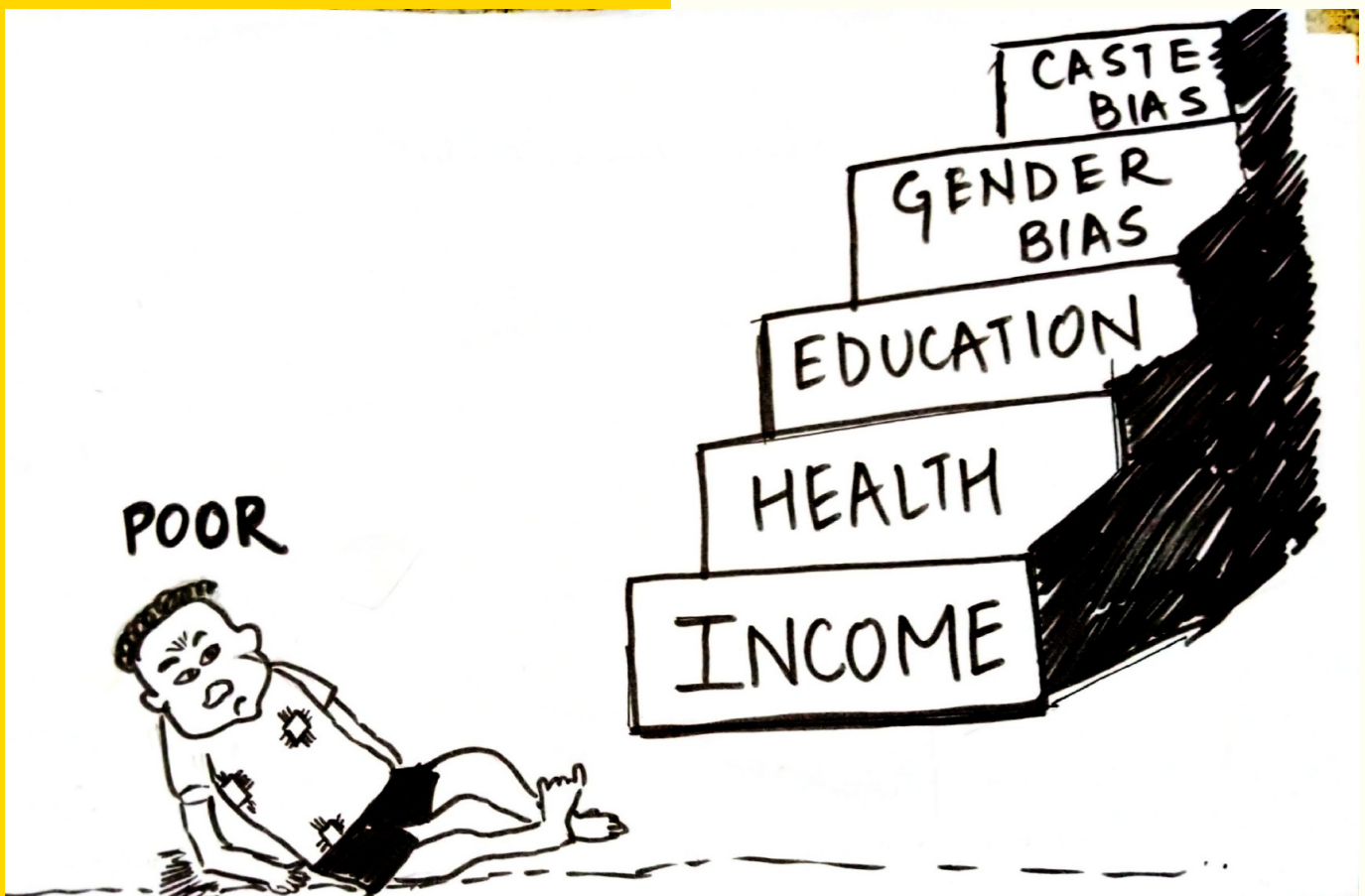
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POVERTY REDEFINED

BY SONU SUNNY

Felix Naschold in his paper on inequality and poverty, argues that inequality and poverty affect each other through links of economic growth[1]. Even though the rate of economic growth is seen as a sign of development and reduction in poverty, what veritably matters is the distribution-corrected rate of growth[2]. A quick comparison of China and India reflects that larger land redistribution through de-collectivization of land led to faster poverty reduction in China than in India. A study[3] which compared two



Cartoon by Jomol Johnson

Poverty is considered as the lack of money to meet basic needs or have access to resources to enjoy a basic standard of living. It is often seen through the lens of inadequate and unequal income. However, once we dive deeper into the subject of poverty, it is not just about the lack of money income, it becomes a multifaceted problem with multidimensional reasons, though income and wealth inequality remain at the centre of this discussion on poverty.

villages in the state of Gujarat found the prevalence of rampant poverty despite high growth rates in the state. The study attributes this observation to the unequal distribution of land and water, among other societal inequalities. Roughly speaking, what matters for poverty reduction is not the size of economic pie but the pattern of division of the pie. Let's talk about this in the indigenous context; India, the 5th largest

economy in the world is home to 270 million people below the poverty line. Looking at wealth inequalities, the top 10% of the population holds 77.4% of total national wealth and the bottom 60% holds 4.8%[4]. Well, the ever-growing pie doesn't seem to feed everyone.

Many of us may not find the co-existence of high inequalities and high growth paradoxical. As the well-known Kuznets hypothesis states, as per-capita income grows, inequality grows; and when income rises beyond a threshold value, inequality reduces. And often efficiency and equity are considered as inevitable tradeoffs. But is it really the case?

Many researchers refute this hypothesis. While the Kuznets hypothesis seems to be empirically correct for much of Europe and Central Asia, Fields (2000) rejects the Kuznets hypothesis for several African countries. Ravallion and Chen (1997), Demery and Squire (1996), Bruno et al. (1996) and Ravallion (2001) find no evidence of a systematic relationship between growth and income distribution[2]. Further, the World Development Report (2000/01) concludes that better distribution is possible without any reduction in economic growth. A study by Hanmer and Naschold in 2000, found that high-inequality countries may need as much as three times the amount of growth to reduce poverty than the low inequality countries. Therefore, it can be argued that growth and better distribution can be complementary and are beneficial in the long-run economic growth.

Looking closely at the matter of inequality and poverty on individual levels than the aggregates, we observe that poverty according to Amartya Sen, is the acknowledgement of deprivation, and is often linked to inequalities of not only income and wealth, but of inequalities across multiple spectrums like health, education, gender and caste. For example, even with high-income equality among two persons, one might be more deprived than the other due to factors of poor health or lack of freedom to participate in the community life, due to reasons of gender and caste. Thus, focusing on just income level will not help us to assess the true nature and causes of poverty and low levels of standard of living (relative poverty). Income will be a useful

resource when a person is able or has the freedom to do and achieve what they value and desire with the income available to them. This freedom, in its true sense, comes with a person being capable. And often inequalities in society and especially, among the poor stratum restricts one from attaining the needed capability with which a poor person can experience the fruits of economic growth and the opportunities that come along with it.

The caste system in India further reinforces class inequality[5]. This is evidenced by data available from Bihar: In 2011, literacy among females was 52.7% compared to 73.4% among males, while the literacy rate of Dalit females was a dismal 38.5% [6]. Thus, the mutually reinforcing inequalities, severely impede the capabilities that can be gained with education[7]. This capability failure further impedes an individual's earning capacity, which affects their income levels, with the potential to push them below poverty lines. Poverty can also be a causal factor for health and education inequalities due to lack of money income. It is quite fascinating to observe how one inequality leads to another, and how poverty and inequality often reinforce each other. **In this sense, poverty can be considered as a capability failure rather than the lowness of income alone.**

Inequalities in many spaces cannot be projected solely as an issue pertaining to the already-poor alone. Studies have shown that countries with high economic disparities are more prone to crime, leading to concentration of political power in few hands. This in turn, tends to undermine social solidarity and civic cooperation within the country which are crucial for successful public policy. For example, the case of ecological poverty, i.e. lack of access to necessities due to lack of environmental resources. This phenomenon, encountered by many village communities and developing countries, can be countered by protecting the environment with innovation, granted community efforts are prevalent. But in communities with a high level of inequality based on caste, class, religion etc., i.e. increased social exclusion, this community empowerment and collective sentiments are hard to come by. And thus, less economic growth and negative ecological effects, further increase the probability of more people being pushed down

the ladder. It acts as a cycle, a vicious cycle of inequality, low economic development and poverty. Therefore, addressing poverty, economic growth and development also demands the addressal of persisting inequalities in a community, be it in the spaces of income, capability, gender or any other aspect. Indeed, all is not possible at once, but one step at a time, however small, towards equality in multiple spaces can be beneficial for the long-lasting well-being and prosperity of any community.

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INEQUALITY: AN ARCHITECTURAL FLAW

BY MANSI GUPTA

considered as money invested to earn more money, and by extension, money that is available for investment. Private property itself becomes a source of capital. The capital invested in a free market reaps profit, and this way, private property (that passes from one generation to another) and profit become the central tenets of capitalism.



Cartoon by Jomol Johnson

As J Muller in *Capitalism and Inequality: What the Right and the Left Get Wrong* (2013) states, capitalist democracies around the globe are, more or less dominated by two issues—the rise of economic inequality and the amount of interference by the governments to address it. Inequality is made to appear as something that happened by accident and can be remedied by tweaking and altering the edges. The article aims to establish how income inequality occurs by design and cannot be fixed merely by piecemeal alterations.

Capitalism, in simple terms, refers to an economic system in which private individuals or businesses own capital goods. A capitalist society thus can be defined as driven by those economic activities which would ultimately lead to profit generation out of the capital invested. Capital can then be

With capitalism, came mobility to indulge in activities; one was not restricted to a particular form of economic investment (for example, agriculture) for capitalist industrialization brought mobility which led to the creation of various avenues for earning income. A very similar logic was applied in India for liberalization; opening up the economy would lead to more jobs, more mobility, more choices on what work to do and where to work. In reality, however, this mobility is constrained by existing skills and experiences of the capital owners and the workers, as well as the interrelationships that may have formed between them. Unlike labour, capital can be used as collateral for loans; the loan so obtained can help generate further wealth. Which means that an individual inheriting generational

wealth can make more capital without working hard; at the same time, another individual, from a family with lower income, has to work laboriously to make both ends meet.

Even Marx acknowledged the bounties created by capitalism. There is no doubt that the level of technological and industrial advancements achieved has been a direct result of capitalism and globalization, but one also needs to keep in mind that these new opportunities and advancements are not exploited by all equally. A report from the Institute for Policy Studies called *Billionaire Bonanza: The Forbes 400 and the Rest of Us* analysed Forbes' list of the 400 richest Americans and found that “the wealthiest 100 households own about as much wealth as the entire African American population in the United States”. This means that almost 100 White families have as much wealth as the 42 million Black people in the United States (US). Hence the presence of income inequality, which can then result in other social inequality, becomes an inherent and inevitable part of the capitalist design. Income inequalities, when framed in the following ways, can also reflect how capitalism can be sustained and regulated by the social systems (a reflection of Gramsci's distinction of Base and Superstructure wherein he comments on how the dominant class can manufacture consent in a way such that the view of the dominant class comes to be accepted as the only sensible way to view the world). Income inequality can be better viewed as structural casteism. In India, this gets manifested as the result of persistent and continued discrimination and oppression faced by people belonging to Scheduled Castes (SCs) who, in the formal sense, enjoy equality of opportunity yet the share of wage labourers among SCs is 63% (NSSO statistics, 2011–12). Black people in the US face similar experiences.

Income inequality is better viewed as structural sexism; this refers to the existing gender pay gap. No amount of struggle for capitalization and equality of opportunity was able to provide men and women equal pay for equal work. Engels, in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), writes how monogamy was a

direct result of male desire to accumulate and protect private property and how it was the institution of monogamy that further led to the establishment of a patriarchal society. Engels, in the same book, writes how “woman was the first human being that tasted bondage. Woman was a slave before slavery existed”. Thus, it does not surprise one when Monster Salary Index (MSI) revealed that the median gross hourly salary for men in India in 2018 was ₹242.49, while ₹196.3 for women, meaning men earned ₹46.19 more than women. The IT services (a direct consequence of capitalism) showed a large pay gap of 26% in favor of men, while in the manufacturing sector, men earn 24% more than women.

Income inequality is better viewed as structural exploitation of children which refers to how children from disadvantaged economic backgrounds are just not able to explore the available opportunities equally. These children are not just treated unequally; they do not get offered opportunities to achieve equality. According to statistics by ActionAid India (2017), 1 in every 11 children in India works to earn a living. There are 33 million child labourers between the ages of 5–18 years in India as per Census 2011 data and 10.13 million between the ages of 5–14 years. According to the Census 2011 data, there are 10,130,000 children involved in various occupations across hazardous sectors. As per HAQ: Center for Child Rights data, child labour is the highest among underprivileged communities such as OBCs, Muslim community, SCs and Scheduled Tribes. So, while children from economically prosperous households can dedicate their precious time to their studies and extracurricular activities, children born in economically backward classes might not even enter the gates of higher education institutions.

Thomas Piketty, in the introduction to his book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2014), asks an important question, “Do the dynamics of private capital accumulation inevitably lead to the concentration of wealth in ever fewer hands, as Karl Marx believed in the nineteenth century? Or do the balancing forces of growth, competition, and technological progress lead in later stages of development to reduced inequality and greater harmony among the classes, as Simon Kuznets thought in the twentieth century?”. Piketty then



argues that in an economy where the rate of return on capital outstrips the rate of growth, inherited wealth will always grow faster than earned wealth. Wealth will accumulate more among the top 10% and 1%, increasing inequality. As Manson (2014) comments, “so the fact that rich kids can swim aimlessly from gap year to internship to a job at father's bank/ministry/ TV network—while the poor kids sweat into their barista uniforms—is not an accident: it is the system working normally”.

Many have tried to draw comparisons between Marx and Piketty, but the only similarity both shares is that both have critiqued capitalism. Marx's critique of capitalism was not about the distribution of income but production; how a breakdown in the profit mechanism will end the capitalist system. Piketty's analysis is on existing historical data; he is concerned about inequality. Piketty sees only wealth and income as social categories.

Capitalism builds on historically-inherited inequalities of class, ethnicity, and gender; capitalism builds on inequality. Inequality might decrease, or as observed in the current pandemic, it might increase, but it is not going anywhere. The tone of the article might suggest that the future is all dark and gloomy, but one needs to remember that change is the only constant. Thomas Paine, in his last renowned pamphlet *Agrarian Justice*, published in 1797, argued for a 10% inheritance tax but balanced this statement by allowing a grant to each adult upon reaching the age of maturity. Thus, wealth would be recycled from the dead to the young, providing greater equality of opportunity to all. Paine also advocated welfare provision and a guaranteed pension for those over 50 years of age. What Paine essentially advised was that people would accept wealth taxation more readily if they had earlier benefitted from a large cash grant in their youth. The more privileged or wealthy people could be persuaded to give up some of their advantages if they saw the benefits of doing so, for society as a whole. But one also needs to remember that the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. The governments and policymakers across the globe need to step back and decide what they want to do with existing inequalities because they come as part and parcel of capitalism and are here to stay.

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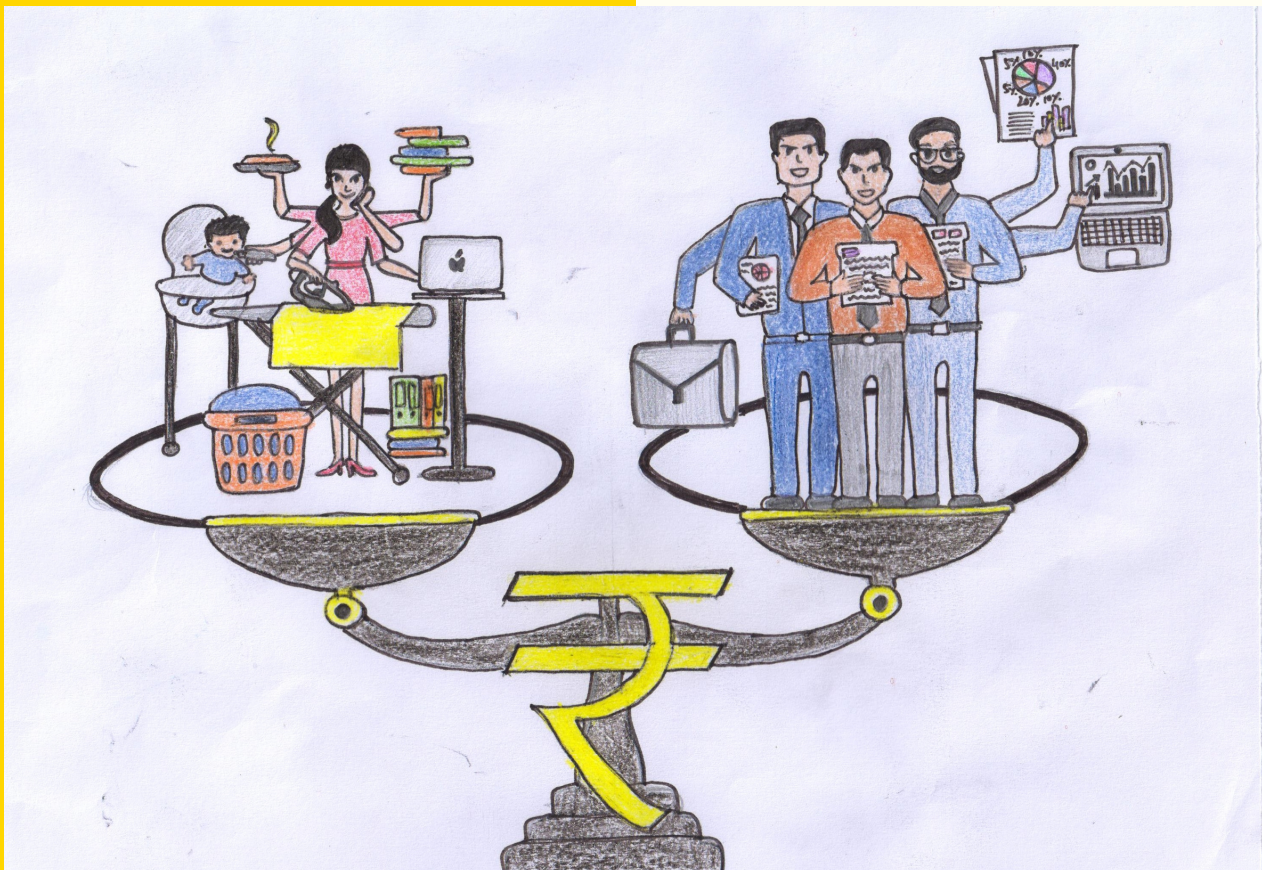


GENDER INEQUALITY AND ITS EFFECT ON ECONOMIC GROWTH

BY RABANI KHURANA

its people. One of the indicators of economic development is gender inequality in the country. For this article, I will be elaborating on gender inequality in education and how that can hamper the economic development of a nation.

Literacy plays a pivotal role in any country's economic development. Economists consider literacy as a national investment. It can be treated as an addition to capital which is expected to yield a stream of income over time. Classical Economists like Alfred Marshall, Adam Smith, and John Stuart Mill recognized education as indispensable for any economy. According to economists,



Cartoon by Janaki Kriti

Economic development includes not only economic growth but also elements of social welfare, early childhood education, and criminal justice reform; besides the economic, political, and social well-being of

good education leads to orderly habits of people leading to a good society, which forms the basis for a better government, and increases the quality of the labour force. Quality education and training of an

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economy's workforce leads to increased efficiency and productivity of the industries in the country. Moreover, it also means more creation of ideas and innovation giving the country's sectors a better edge. Hence gender inequality can lead to aggregate inefficiency in the economy.

According to the World Bank's definition of literacy, female literacy can be considered as a proxy for the effectiveness of the education system in a country. In the poorest quartile of countries in 1990, only 5% of adult women had secondary education which is one-half of that of men. On the other hand, in the richest quartile of countries, 51% of adult women had secondary education while the level, for men, was 88%. This does give rise to a popular theory stating that gender inequality reduces with the level of industrialization as it leads to greater urbanization. Technological progress e.g., formula milk, the contraceptive pill has reduced women's comparative advantage in child-rearing, and more use of items like washing machines and dishwashers have eased domestic work, but important differences lie in the division of housework and child care. The evidence presented in the World Development Report in 2012 directs that in both developed and developing countries women devote much more time to housework and child care as compared to men, at the expense of "market time".

Looking at the condition in India, religious, traditional and cultural strictures have led to male domination and preference in society. Here, the girl child is usually employed in domestic work or agricultural labour while parents prefer spending on the son's education as he is considered the future bread earner of the family while girls are considered a liability. The National Sample Survey on Status of Education in India 2005 has shown that 50% in rural India and 20% in urban India of the families don't have even one literate girl child above age of 15. Out of 13,459,734 dropouts from Secondary schooling 6.08% are male and 7.98% are female. The Mahila Samakgya and the Sarvya Shiksha Abhiyan have increased the literacy rate of girls from 15.35% in 1971 to 54.16% in 2001. Moreover, the District Primary Education Programme of the Central Government has reduced the dropout rates to less than 5%. However, despite these policies according to a paper written by Ranjana Banerjee, 70.38% of girls

are still child laborers, 27.33% are malnourished and 70% face child abuse.

Year	% Literate	Male	Female	M/F Literacy Gap
1971	34.45.	45.96 m	21.98	23.98
1981	43.57	56.37	29.75	26.62
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	65.38	75.85	54.16.	21.69

Table: Sex wise literacy rate from 1971-2001
Source: Banerjee (2011)

Total Population	Out Of School Children	Percentage
194028643	13459734	6.94
109619053	6772506	6.18
84409590	6687228	7.93

Table: Number and percentage of out of school children aged 6-13 years in India
Source: Banerjee (2011)

A gender gap develops in any country in the level of education when men are more educated than women (or vice versa). A gender gap also arises in the return to education when the output elasticity is more for one gender compared to the other meaning that the marginal products of education also differ between genders. As reviewed in a research paper by Stephan Klasen and Manuel Santos Silva, a majority of theories on Gender Studies show that gender inequality hampers the economic growth of a nation over the long run. In most models, it has been noticed that the opportunity costs of a women's time are lower than that of men which translates that the value given to women's time is less than the value given to men's time. This leads women to spend most of their time in domestic work and child-rearing causing a high population growth rate which harms the long-run economic growth of a nation.

Another impact of the low value of female time is a lower investment in female education. If women are expected to specialize only in domestic activities, the return on female education for the parents will be low and therefore parents prefer spending their limited income on the education of the male child over the female. Hence, in the long run, this lower human capital investment reduces economic development. The reasoning can easily be extended to other production capabilities



beyond education, such as health and access to capital. Often, female output elasticities are assumed to be larger than male elasticities, due to intergenerational externalities linked to a woman's role as the primary caretaker in the family. In a paper by Stephen Knowles, Paula K Lorgelly, and P. Dorian Owen, they hypothesize the positive externalities associated with female education.

An improvement in the literacy levels of women leads to reducing fertility and infant mortality rates - which improve the quantity and quality of education of children. Gender inequality can be considered a sort of distortion tax in an economy that limits women's access to education; employment draws talent from a smaller pool of labor than an economy with equal access. Occupational choice models with a heterogeneous talent show that exogenous barriers to women's participation in the labor market and entrepreneurial occupations reduce aggregate productivity and per capita output. Therefore, men and women can be considered as imperfect substitutes in production, and thus, male-bias in production factors causes an efficiency loss for the economy. Hence, it is essential that institutions aid the design of effective policies that are aimed at eradicating these disparities, discouraging these norms, and promoting efficiency by rewarding female talent in the economic and political spheres.

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Illustration by Tanya Gupta



THE IMPACT OF INEQUALITY AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF A MULTI FACETED REALITY

BY CLARE ANN BIJU

The world has been thrust into the abysmal reality of a global pandemic and people from the underprivileged part of the society have been forced to bear the brunt of it. We are all consciously part of the system and have always been aware of the injustice and inequality that exists among us but all those signs of despondency have become too distinct to be ignored. When the top 10% hold 77% of the total national wealth,[1] it becomes an extremely consequential issue that needs to be addressed. According to a 2017 Oxfam report, India is one of the most unequal economies in the world, second only to Russia. The Human Development Report 2019 has also reiterated that there has been a rise of inequality in India over the past two decades.

Poverty reduction does not automatically entail the absence of inequality. India has been able to initiate the mitigation of poverty to a certain extent, albeit at an incredibly slow pace with the introduction of the economic reforms in the early 1990s but inequality has been on a mass rise among the population, particularly in the last decade of the 20th century and the first

decade of the 21st century. More than 800 million people are considered poor in India, a country that has over 130 billionaires.[2]

The coronavirus pandemic has helped accentuate the deeply embedded inequality and has shown that the vulnerable sections of the society have been gravely affected by its outcome. Because of the severely under invested health care sector in India, many of the testing and detention are carried out by the primary health centres which are overburdened by inadequate staffing. The rural population is deprived of health care accessibility due to reasons like distance and transportation, insurance coverage, poor health literacy and societal stigma. The availability of primary health care facilities is incredibly less than the required and established norm of the WHO. The poor infrastructure of the government health care facilities constitutes one of the main reasons for increased mortality among the economically under-privileged. Only 0.5% of the rural population has the benefit of basic sanitation and only an average of 14% of the household income was seen to be spent on health care by poor households with a major dip of 1.3% in the state of Tamil Nadu [3]. The announcement of additional Rs.150000 crores to aid health related work proved to be painfully inadequate in vision of the long term effects of the pandemic to the health of the nation.

Another main issue that woefully pointed out the inequality was the state and access of education during the crisis. The introduction of digital learning to facilitate education proved to be useful to many but also showed the grossly technology deprived face of the society. A severe lack of electricity in many rural parts of the country has also disrupted the education of children. The existence of gender inequality is also a bane to the economy and the society as a whole. UNDP report states that India ranks 132 out of 187 countries on gender inequality. A significant lack of presence of

presence of women in the labour force and law making entities points out how lacking India still is, when it comes to acceptance and appreciation. Rising child birth deaths and early forced marriage are also stemmed from the unequal treatment of women.

MSMEs are a major part of the economy but are disproportionately affected because of their size and limited cash flows. They were not strong enough to withstand the immediate shock of the lockdown and required more collective input from the part of the government. While the government did come up with an extensive benefit package where it bore 24% of the EPF of both the employees and employers combined, it failed to reach its mark as only businesses having up to 100 employees and whose 90% earned less than Rs. 15000 were eligible to avail it. A survey of 5000 MSMEs by AIMO revealed that 71% of the businesses were unable to pay their workers in March 2020[4]. The government is also under pressure for not having adequate data regarding MSMEs and it has proved to be an obstacle for the entities in coming with long term relief plans and in identifying businesses that require immediate attention.

The unfortunate migrant crisis brings forward the plight of internal migrant workers who were stranded without resources and were forced to travel hundreds of kilometres in the heat to reach their homes as the result of the unprecedented lockdown. They had absolutely no access to social security and were denied transportation. A report by the Stranded Workers Action Network showed that 50% of the workers had rations left for less than a day. A majority of them had not been paid by their employers during the lockdown.[5]

It is ironical that the majority of the people who contribute towards the national income belong to the working class. While the general population was pushed into the black hole of poverty, the rich seemed to get richer. Muke-

sh Ambani became the 4th richest person in the world with a net worth of \$79.3 billion, gaining \$22 billion this year, essentially during the pandemic.[6] This extraordinary wealth gain during the pandemic can be seen as an even dangerous reality of wealth inequality. It has been predicted that this huge gain of wealth among the hands of very few might even double the poverty levels in India. There is a need for a foundational change in the economy and a restructuring in the society. While the hapless population lives in constant trepidation and are faced with the quandary of choosing between basic necessities, it is humongously inappropriate that the very few percentage of the society is entrusted with the majority of the resources. As years pass by and new policies are formulated, the gap between the rich and the poor seems to be distressingly accelerated.

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HEALTH INEQUALITY IN INDIA: A CLOSER LOOK

BY JANAYA GOEL

between those who had access to health facilities and those who did not skyrocketed. Healthcare is important for the growth of not only a nation but an individual as well.

A considerable number of people live short and brutal lives involving hunger, disease and ill health. It is not uncommon in India to cross a malnourished child begging at a traffic signal for some money or food and a child rolling up his window at the same child on his way to his school, enjoying a snack. This extraordinary contrast in lives is what we regard here as inequality and injustice.



Cartoon by Nicole Srishti Basile

Health is a parameter which has gained global importance as an indicator of development only in the recent past. Most countries throughout the twentieth century concentrated on economic growth as their first priority. Somewhere in that race, this crucial factor -its public provision and distribution took a backseat. The gap

Inequalities in health are unjust and there are preventable differences in people's health conditions. Health inequalities are against the principle of social justice as these can be avoided and are primarily the result of socio-economic situations. It is measured by certain parameters like life expectancy, mortality rate, obesity etc. Apart from

physical health, one's mental health is also instrumental in today's scenario. A research by Aarhus University suggested that people with chronic mental health problems live a shorter life compared to others.[1] The inequality compared through these indicators, exists at many levels. Firstly, it is evident between rich and poor countries. Secondly, the inequality within these nations is also significant. For example, in India, a person in Kerala can live for 18 more years than one in Jharkhand or Bihar.[2] Then there are differences between the regions as well- like in Kerala, where the Malabar region runs behind other areas in the state in terms of health indicators. In the backward regions also, the rich have better access to facilities than the poor.

years have captured that health inequalities in India exist and they are rising but none mention the reasons for such a gap and they do not concentrate on many population groups - like the LGBTQ+ community, migrant workers, people who are homeless, and people with disabilities etc.

One of the major reasons for such a stark contrast in health levels is that it is difficult to monitor the health of a population of over 1 billion.[3] Healthcare equity and the structure of Healthcare institutions need to be altered by channelling resources and promoting awareness and participation of people in health initiatives

Causes of health inequalities

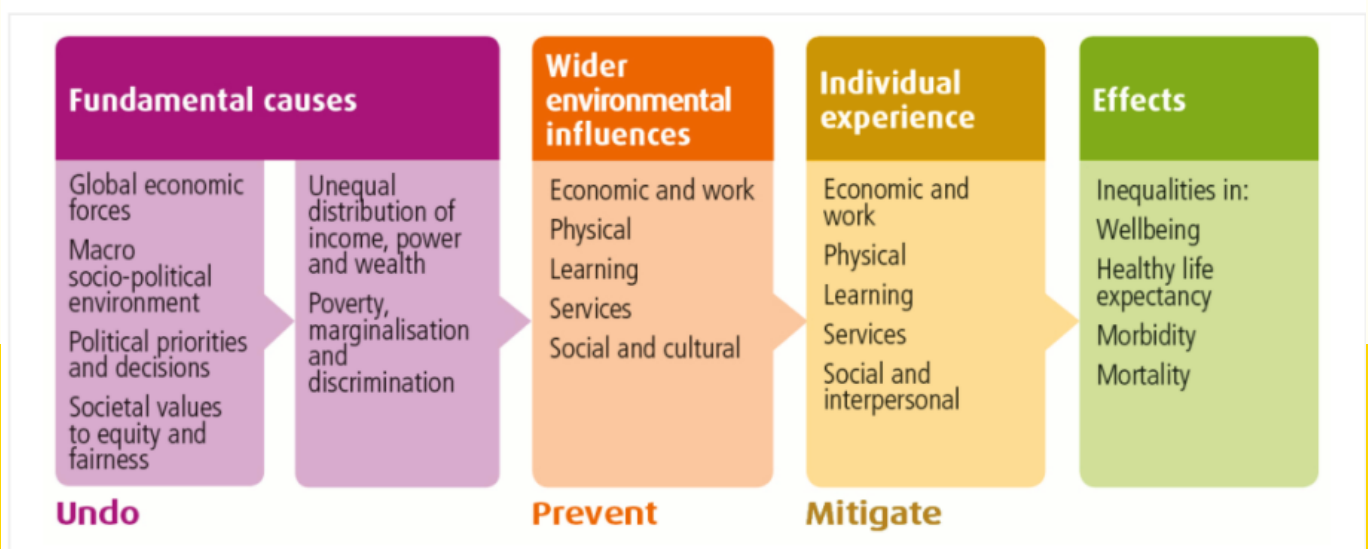


Image Source: <http://www.healthscotland.scot/health-inequalities/what-are-health-inequalityess>

Health inequalities are moulded through region, income, class, religion, gender, caste and other socio-economic factors in India. The establishment of primary health centres post-independence was a great step towards provision of medical facilities for all. However, due to lack of direction and commitment these centres have turned obsolete and the public health system has failed in providing the poor, marginalised and historically disadvantaged groups adequate healthcare and exposed them to the induced inequities of the market mechanism. [2] Several researches over the

Two renowned economists- Amartya Sen and Jagdish Bhagwati held opposite views on what the Indian government's priorities should be, which is popularly known as the Sen- Bhagwati debate[5]. Amartya Sen is a firm believer that India should invest in its social infrastructure, improve the quality of human capital and hence raise productivity and economic growth. He promoted investment in health and education as the primary goal to prevent widening inequalities. On the other hand, Jagdish Bhagwati emphasized that sole focus on growth can help to acquire resources for

investment in social infrastructure. He explained that growth may initially increase inequality but gradually enough resources can help to reducing inequality by larger measures. This debate does not have a clear winner but developments in the global and Indian scenario have added valuable pros and cons under both columns and only time can reveal which is more significant.

Many developing countries face similar issues to combat inequality. We can learn from each other - like our neighbour Sri Lanka, which has a high HDI quotient due to significant public spending on health and education. Health equality is impossible to achieve without socio-economic equality. India spends only 3.6% of its GDP on healthcare.[4] This shows the low priority given to the sector. If the country's fiscal management improves, essential inputs in health can be provided without altering other expenditures.

Healthcare for people residing in urban slums is very challenging to provide. The data regarding this large section of the population is almost non-existent and mostly unreliable. The immense poverty, unhygienic living conditions and social inequality are harbourers of poor health including diseases.

Immunisation is not taken care of, exposing people to avoidable diseases, reflecting poor supervision. Establishment of proper units to monitor availability, easy provision and data regarding vaccinations will help India move ahead from only 25% of immunisation in states. The public and private sectors have to join hands and bring about structural changes to provide better services to a larger population.

Medical education has to be made more prevalent. Many deserving students, aspiring to serve the population do not get a chance due to various reasons including smaller number of good institutes. This can help in increasing the medical staff as well as prospects of research in the field. Lack of perfection and knowledge has led to antibiotics being widely mishandled for self-treatment of ailments. Making modern health parameters known in rural setups and understanding community needs can go a long way in promoting health equality through

empowerment of people to manage their own health.

In times of globalisation, rampant economic progress must not lose sight of equitable distribution, role of leadership and people's participation in development. Technology should include, rather than exclude the less privileged. For example, an application called 'Share the Meal' helps us feed a child for an entire day through just a touch on the screen and 80 cents. This initiative can go a long way in eradicating global hunger. In a diverse country like India with embedded inequalities and spurred economic growth, the role of policies is significant in paving the country's path to development.

Trends in Equity Measures Used in Health Inequalities Research in India (1990–2016)

Disparity measure	Total (%)	1990–2000 (%)	2000–10 (%)	2010–2016 (%)
Region	34.8	25.8	28.6	45.2
Income	61.2	48.3	55.3	72.2
Occupation	15.2	14.2	15.0	15.8
Caste/Tribe	12.9	15.8	11.9	13.6
Religion	8.8	10.8	7.9	9.5
Gender	36.1	33.3	35.2	38.1
Education	45.4	46.7	39.7	52.9

Note: Multiple measures of equity were present in many studies

Image Source:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles>

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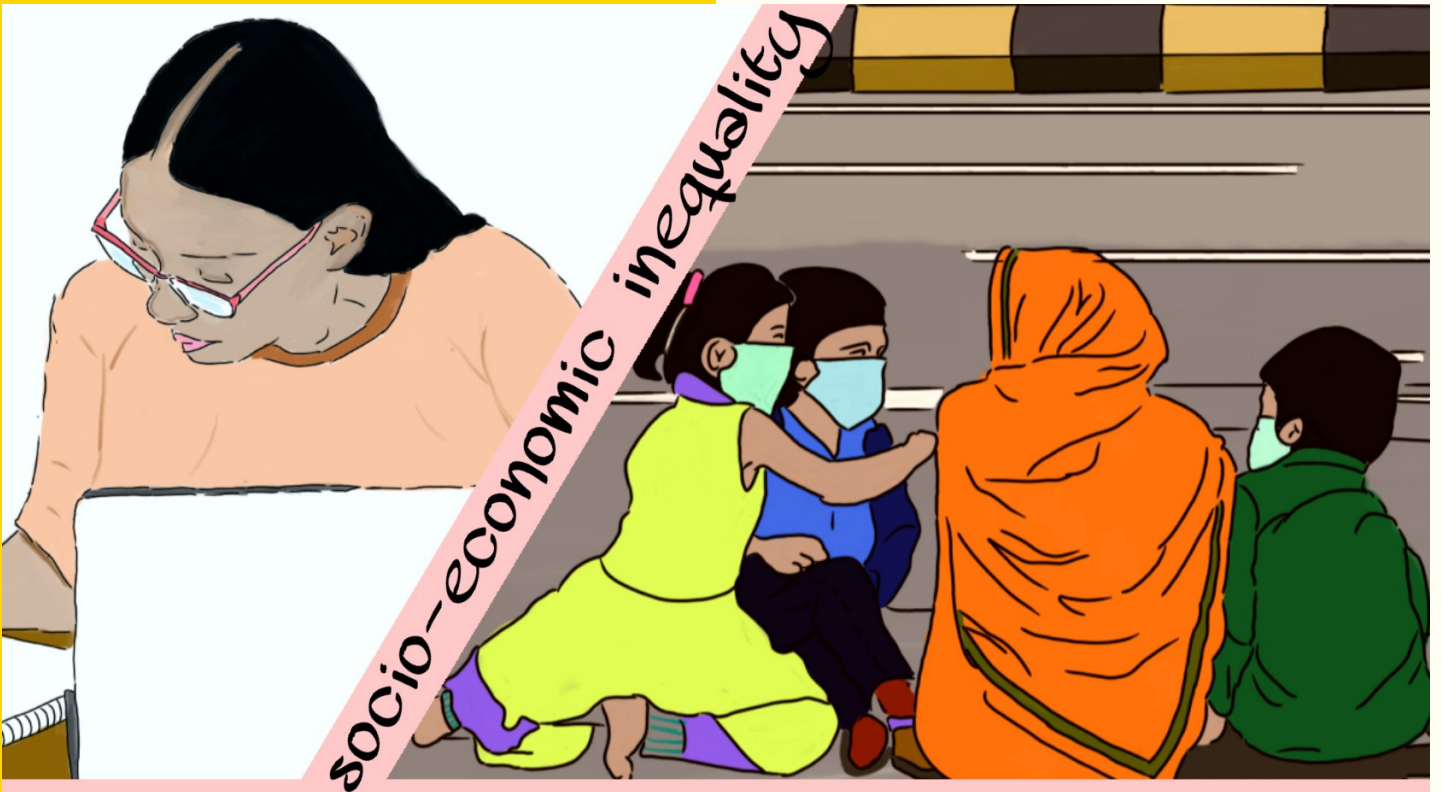
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COVID-19 AND INEQUALITY IN INDIA

BY SHAMBHAVI KALASH

Economic inequality in India has been accentuated by the pandemic which has unknowingly been a key player in shining the spotlight on India's biggest pitfalls. For instance, analyzing economic inequality in the public health sector would show that the testing experiences, for an average middle-class person, and an urban individual, is vastly different, India's healthcare system offers everybody free/subsidized care at government hospitals.



Cartoon by Stefiya Thomas

If Covid-19 were an ocean, being privileged would mean sailing on a boat while the rest would drown in its treacherous waters. The pandemic has caused the biggest global recession since The Great Depression, with around one-third of the global population being placed in lockdown, furthering economic inequality all around the globe.

The case, for India - as rightfully pointed out by Professor Pratik Chakrabarti from the University of Manchester is nothing short of dire. "Epidemics usually are good mirrors of society and country." These past months have "exposed how precarious people's lives are in India."

While in practice, this has aided a lot of people, but the treatment options, in reality, remain as bicameral as ever. Public hospitals remain chronically underfunded and in comparison to private hospitals, don't hold up to the same quality of services the latter can provide. Visitors at the government-run hospitals have to wait in the crowded lines for days for even free COVID-19 testing; since they can neither afford the high prices of the private hospitals, nor the isolation suites that the Delhi government had ordered a few hotels to be converted into.

If one preens over at the education sector, they can easily look at the equity challenges students and academicians across the nation face. Educational inequity, due to classes being shifted into an online mode so as to not risk the further spread of the infection has led to the inevitable result of people from lower economic background to not be able to access resources in comparison to the privileged youth, furthering the socio-economic divide. Students in areas like Jammu and Kashmir have to rely on unstable 2G connection to attend classes and often miss out due to a lack of viable resources, thus limiting their educational opportunities to something they cannot control. Reopening educational institutions comes with its own set of challenges – risk of infection and low student turnout in fear of the virus, but without offline classes, hundreds of thousands of students in from the lower-income families would miss out on the mid-day meal programs and resort to searching for alternatives by working and risking their lives for their daily bread.

The last area to examine would be the general technological divide that segregates Indians - individuals who can afford to shift their modus operandi online and the ones who cannot. Some businesses are finding the lockdown to be a boon - like IT, software, and social media marketing, and are thriving with the sudden influx in businesses being transferred there and generating more profit for them. While the offline sectors, such as publishing, manufacturing, agriculture, are slowly recuperating from the lockdown. The digital divide in India is already rampant; one of the major instruments for fanning the flames of India's digital divide would be the erratic power supply. The effects of this could be seen across class, gender, region, and income levels of an individual. According to a report conducted by the National Sample Survey Organization in 2018, it was shown that among the twenty percent of the poorest households in India, only 2.7% have access to a computer and 8.9% have access to internet facilities.

And in contrast, for the top 20% of India's households, the proportions for the same are 27.6% and 50.5%, making it evident that online classes, while they ensure the

transmission of information and academic guidance, cannot be effective in ensuring digital equity unless the resource distributions are made to be more accommodating for all classes of India. The lockdown had already dwindled down travelling and barring people from using internet cafes in fear of catching the virus. And thus, as of July 2020, 70-80% have no internet access at all, who hail from the excluded rural class.

Essential services workers such as helpers, vendors, and local business owners, suffer due to lack of customers or continuing with the work and risking their lives, leading to businesses being in a state of decay or getting shut down. For instance, an electrician might not be as digitally literate to accept online payment modes like Paytm or be able to troubleshoot from the comfort of their home. One can argue that they can learn, but on a wider scale, it is not as easy as it looks and they would still be struggling on a greater level and searching for more work to sustain themselves as compared to a salaried person who is able to successfully transition into Work-from-Home mode.

The other problem Work-from-Home shows is that of gender inequality. Women workers, now that they stay at home, are unfairly subjected to household work, which is not expected from their male professional counterparts; hampering the women's professional job output. Secondly, barriers to internet connectivity and unreliable power sources also pose a huge challenge to the employee's job output, further adding to their mental stress.

In conclusion, it can be attested that the global pandemic has brought upon serious instances of inequality in the nation, from all points of view: social, health, economic, gender, technological. The nation is akin to a purgatory with one side of the populace having the luxury of over-reliance on online platforms to work, staying inside, getting tested at private hospitals; while on the flip side, the unfortunate are left riddled with long testing queues, risking their lives to earn their daily bread, and not having access to the same resources the privileged enjoy, significantly hampering their life quality.

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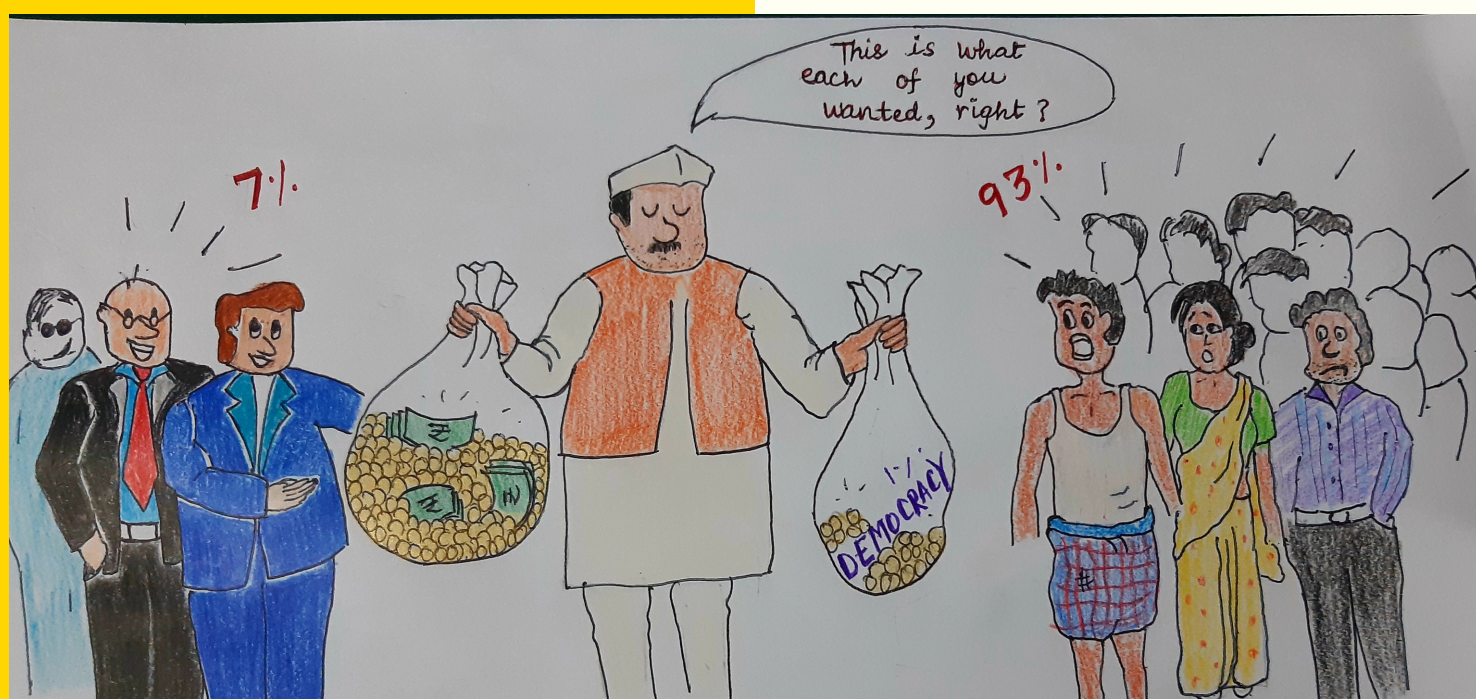
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UNDERSTANDING ECONOMIC INEQUALITY, SOCIAL POLICY, AND DEMOCRACY

BY AMRITHA BIJU

implies each act autonomously, without any coercion, in the democratic process, and substantive equality delivers unbiased opportunities for ostracized or marginalized people. Democratic liberties extend across various spheres – financial, cultural, social, political, economic, and civil. However, notwithstanding the paradigm shift to democratization, from 1980 to 2016, the wealthiest one percent of the world amassed an alarming total of twenty-seven percent of the global gross domestic product. [1]

According to the 2018 Global Wealth Report, India's staggering wealth gap and unequal income distribution help the wealthiest reap the lion's



Cartoon by Riya Gangwal

Although the third wave of democratization has markedly given rise to globalization, privatization, and innovation, the widening chasm of inequality continues to plague developing and advanced economies alike and pronounces a significant challenge to democratic resilience. With the shift to electoral democracy, gross economic inequality, especially stark differences in the distributional patterns of income and wealth, further exacerbated the ills of democracy. In principle, democracy and its institutions carry the fundamental freedom of egalitarianism in choice, opportunity, and law and secure both procedural and substantive freedoms. Procedural equality

share of the benefit and disproportionately affect complete economic integration. In 2018, 68.6% of India's wealth was heavily concentrated and shared by the wealthiest five per cent, and the bottom sixty percent accounted for a meagre 4.7% [2]. Ranked 147th out of 157 in the 2018 Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index, developed by Oxfam and Development Finance International, India is one of several industrialized economies that is entrenched by severe economic inequality that gets exacerbated by the social ills of caste, class, religion, and gender based inequalities. India's Gini wealth coefficient has steadily risen from 81.3% in

2013 to 85.4% in 2018 [3]. Crony capitalism, weakened labour protection and standards, poor skill development, jobless growth, and business-friendly institutional policies are viewed as the key contributors to India's economic inequality.

Societally, economic inequality breeds the disenfranchisement of cultural, ethnic, and religious identities and instigates social unrest and immobility, and political polarization. Moreover, the worsening economic inequality compounds public discontentment with a lack of transparency and accountability in the skewed distribution and access to public goods and services. With the growing gulf of haves and have-nots, the dissatisfaction can also be detrimental to the legitimacy and support towards electoral democracy. If unregulated, sustained opposition can give rise to political anomie; an individualistic behavioral phenomenon that leads to the collapse of the moral conscience ahead of an individual's self-interest and disproportionately affects vulnerable communities [4]. Over time, a decline in trust can also lead to a cyclical pattern of political disengagement and jeopardizes the confidence in the government structure.

In principle, democracy is a public-spirited system of governance; however, several ideational and structural constraints impinge on the democratic process and distort the intent and impact of social policy. Broadly speaking, the functioning of a democracy is affected by the following constraints: state-directed policies and strategies and the capacities of the relevant stakeholders in fulfilling social policy. Firstly, the pursuance of any state government policies and demands is contingent upon the revenue obtained; and therefore, the satisfaction of the economic interests of the private, profit-maximizing actors is a necessary condition to the economy. In other words, each policy proposed by the democratic state is therefore reliant on the vitality of the business industry and undermines the prolonged policy goals that gain political traction [5]. Also, the short-term interests of the private firms are prioritized above the long-term redistributive and welfare policies and dilute its prospects because of the rotational nature of

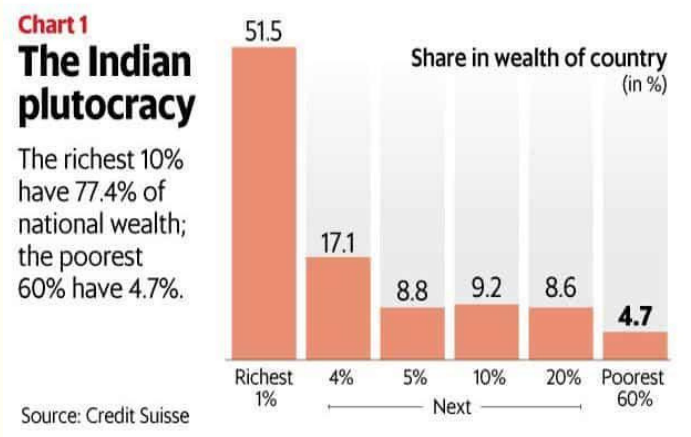


Chart showing share in wealth of the country
Image source: Chakravarty (2018)

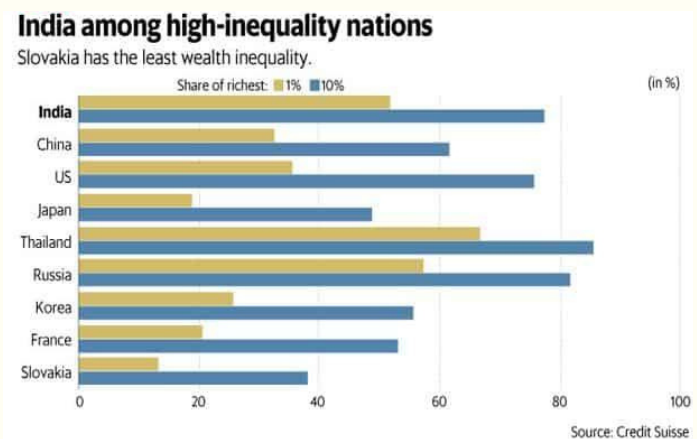


Chart showing share of wealth of the richest 1% and 10%
Image source: Chakravarty (2018)

democracy. Secondly, campaign finance and lobbying, corruption, and bribery disturb the socially optimum outcome of the political processes and misrepresent the collective will and demands [6]. As a result, the robustness of the standing political institutions is centered on how policy tools and instruments improve or obstruct the fundamental tenets of democracy.

Although several established democracies have stood the test of time, economic inequality is persistently on the rise and thus requires sound policymaking formulated with due stakeholder engagement to promote a directional shift to equity. Contrary to popular belief, several less



developed economies and middle-income economies, such as Cambodia, Brazil, Peru, and Tanzania, have made strides against inequality; each shared coordinated macroeconomic policy with thorough social policies [7]. Universal provision of decent education and health, improved economic connectivity, and inclusive civic participation are common policies shared by the aforementioned nations to reduce inequality. Country-specific positive policies must be front and center in policy intervention to redress overlapping, multidimensional inequalities and must be integrated into political decision-making processes and linkages for social cohesion. Additionally, revision of existing policy should be cognizant of the existing asymmetries of information and the rent-seeking behavior of the administration that may hinder the success of these policies. Lastly, the success of social policy outcomes is largely determined by the credibility of the institutional framework, especially with regard to the strength of autonomous state institutions, which must be both accessible and effective in their capacity.

In totality, the economic divide between the wealthy and the poor can adversely affect the acceptability and trust in democracy and its functionality with damaging effects on social integration, political consensus, representation, equitable distribution of wealth, and welfare. The complex relationship between economic inequality and democracy is non-linear and varies from an economy to another; however, a high level of economic inequality doesn't imply the collapse of the prevailing political system, either democratic or autocratic system. In other words, inequality affects the scope of democratic principles in various social, economic, and political institutions. Therefore, economic inequality can profoundly deteriorate the resilience and sustainability of democratic institutions.

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WEBINAR ON PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS AMIDST COVID-19

REPORT WRITTEN BY ARUNIMA SRIVASTAVA

The nationwide lockdown that was imposed by the Government of India on March 24, 2020 has taken a huge toll on the mental health of the people. Recognizing the significance of mental health awareness, the Economics Department of JMC had organized a webinar on 'Psycho-social Support for Students amidst COVID-19' on May 19, 2020, from 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. The event was organized in collaboration with Hope and Strength Initiative (HASI) which is a not-for-profit organization that aims to change the conversation around mental health and ensure that people have access to affordable mental health services.

Moderated by Assistant Professor of the Economics department, Ms Jasmin Singh, the webinar was conducted by Ms Ridhima Sharma, a Clinical Psychologist and a licensed mental health professional under the Rehabilitation Council of India. Ms. Sharma is a gold medallist in M.Phil. (Clinical Psychology) and is also an art-based therapist, certified by the World Centre for Creative Learning Foundation. She has an array of experience of working extensively with young adults, children, persons with disabilities and corporate working professionals.

The webinar was highly engaging and informative. Ms Sharma highlighted the interlinkages between one's thoughts, the brain and one's emotions, and explained the functions of the various parts of the

brain. She particularly addressed the challenges that young adults may be facing during the pandemic by giving practical advice. By highlighting the pernicious effects of watching television news media, she urged the students to switch to reading print media as it is less likely to sensationalize information or news. Emphasis was made on the need to rely on facts to reduce the perception of threat during such distressing times. Ms Sharma also underlined the need to delink productivity with fatigue; students often feel a sense of achievement only when they feel tiredness. She insisted that students should make a 'buffer phase' during the day. The webinar ended on an important point that constant positivity is not required and that toxic positivity is indeed unhealthy. The webinar was extremely helpful for students as it gave useful insights into maintaining mental well-being.

Edited by Arpita Mary Abraham

UNDERSTANDING INDIA'S EMPLOYMENT PROBLEM - A WEBINAR

REPORT WRITTEN BY GATHA SINGH,

An interactive webinar on 'Understanding India's Employment Problem' was hosted by the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) in association with the Department of Economics of Jesus and Mary College (JMC), on 11th June 2020.

Dr. Arup Mitra, the speaker for the session, is Professor and Dean at South Asian University. He has worked at the Institute of Economic Growth as Professor of Economics. He was also the Director General of National Institute of Labour Economics Research and Development (NILERD), Government of India. His research interests include development economics, urban issues, labour and welfare, corruption, industrial growth and productivity, services sector, as well as gender inequality. He was awarded by the Indian Econometric Society 'the Mahalanobis Memorial Gold Medal' for his outstanding contribution to quantitative economics. He has been a member of several expert committees. His book on Inclusive Growth, Employment and Well-being published by Springer has received Professor S. R. Sen Best Book Award, 2019.

Ms. Rajni Singh, Associate Professor, Department of Economics invited Sr. Dr. Rosily T.L. r.j.m, Principal, JMC to give the Welcome Address. Sr. Dr. Rosily talked about the plight of migrant workers, and how work from home has become the new feature of today. The session was moderated by Ms. Shalini Srivastava, Associate Professor, Department of Economics.

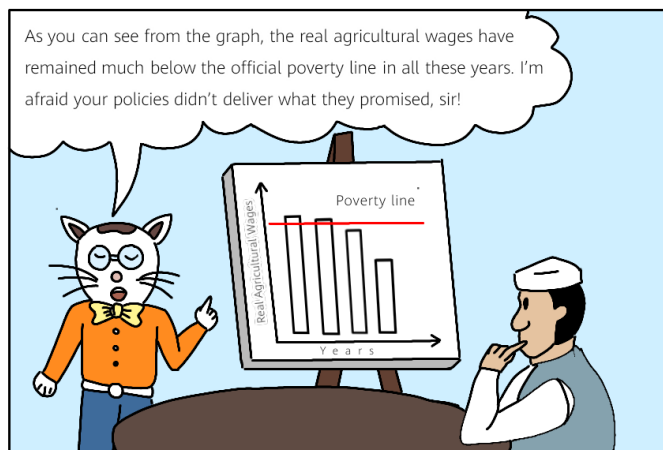
Dr Mitra talked about the employment problem and how it covers both unemployed and those employed in low productivity sectors. Migration patterns, ethnicity and poverty was also discussed. Migrants have different motivation to reduce poverty and contribution of low-income households in city growth and poverty reduction exceeds the benefits they receive. Dr. Mitra discussed how unemployment rate is not necessarily a negative indicator and it may reflect capability to search for better opportunities. He also discussed Kuznets hypothesis, Harris Todaro model, Network Theory, Theory of Labour Market Segmentation and Percolation effect. This was followed by a Q&A session.



The session was very interactive and lively. Before concluding the webinar, Ms. Srivastava invited Dr. Alka Marwaha, Convenor IQAC to propose the Vote of Thanks.

Edited by Paridhi Puri

Cato the Eco Cat



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PRIVATISATION IN INDIA- A PROBLEM OR PANACEA?

BY CLARE ANN BIJU

Summary of Facebook Discussion

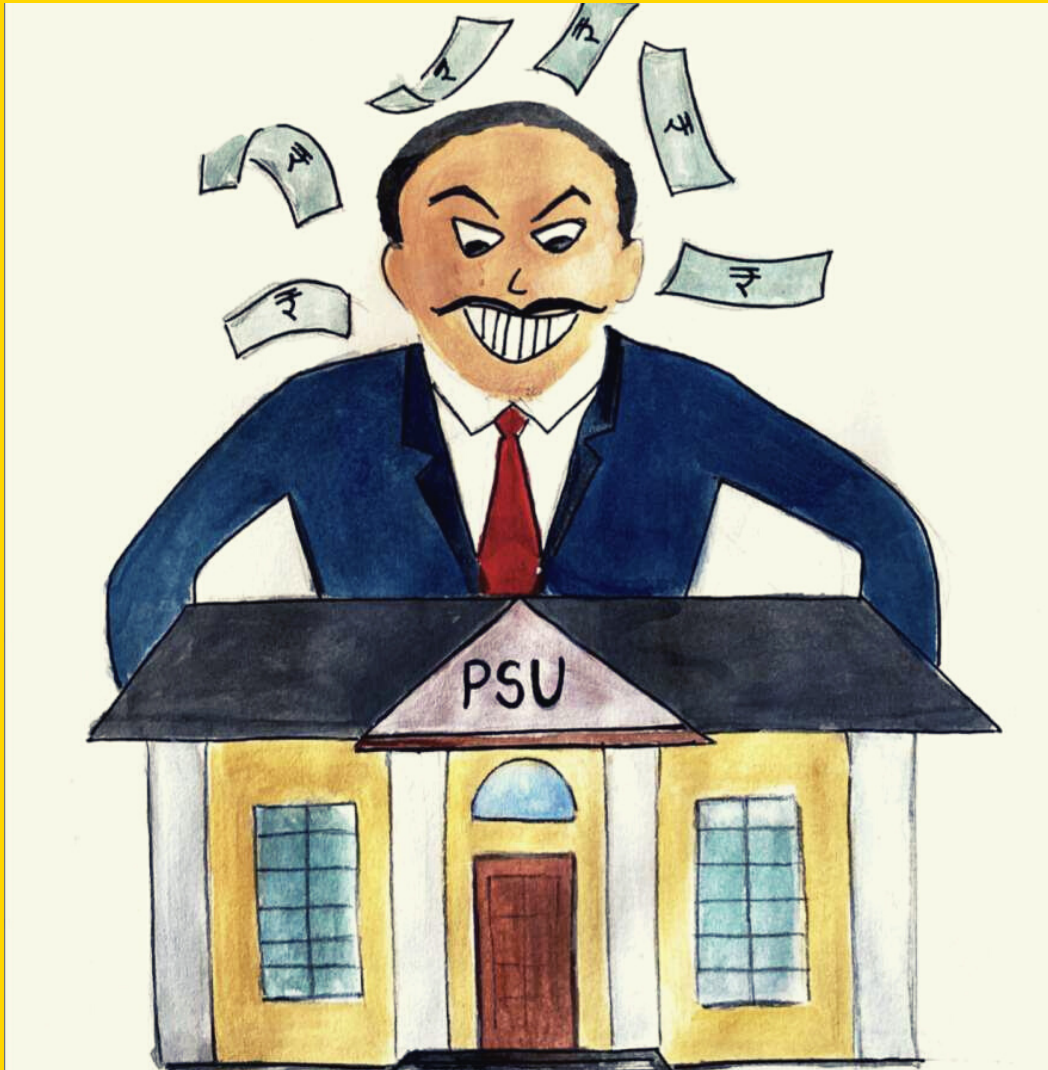
The Indian economy has been going through a tumultuous phase during the global pandemic. To pull the economy out of this turmoil, the government announced extensive privatisation measures. In light of this, a Facebook Discussion was organised by The Contrarian on 19th July, 2020 on the theme 'Privatisation in India- a Problem or Panacea?'. People came forward with nuanced takes on the phenomenon; the merits, challenges and apprehensions associated with privatisation, particularly in the Indian context.

The responses varied vastly, with the spectrum of opinions ranging from a strong advocacy of privatisation to impassioned rebuttals. Some believed that privatisation will bring in more efficiency and provide an environment conducive for increased performance across different sectors. They cited that the advent of New Public Services under increased privatisation has led to the renovation of public-sector strategies and has emerged as a model that would help revive the economy. The example of the telecom industry was supplemented as a case in point.

Apprehensions, as well as ambivalence towards the idea of privatisation, were also present. Many argued that though the measure may increase the efficiency of the services provided by industries, it will hamper their inclusiveness and accessibility, and exacerbate inequalities. They maintained that though privatisation increases competition, it also leads to more oligopolistic interdependence in economic decisions. The importance of having a balance between the public and private intervention was stressed upon. It is observed that while the telecom industry has thrived under privatisation, there are certain sectors like healthcare and education that require substantive government assistance to provide equal, inclusive and affordable services.

It was also asserted that privatisation is not suitable for the current economic climate; there has been a massive spike in unemployment (23% in April 2020) followed by a reduced level of income. Thus, the detractors believed that it would not be in the best interests of the working-class populace, to introduce privatisation into a weak economy that employs over 15 lakh people in Public Sector Enterprises. They





Cartoon by Nicole Srishti Basile

also argued that privatisation was a short-term strategy that would not be effective in the long run.

Privatisation is, indeed, an effective economic measure *if* implemented with conscious efforts and proper regulation. Though it cannot be seen as an absolute cure for all economic woes, the level of its effectiveness depends on whether its objectives and measures are carefully drawn out. Though the necessity of privatisation remains a contentious matter, the consensus is that healthcare and education, among other sectors in our country, are in dire

need of advancements. Policymakers must ensure that there is a clear and direct vision in the implementation of the appropriate economic measures.

Edited by Prisha Saxena

WORKSHOP ON ACADEMIC WRITING

REPORT WRITTEN BY MANSI GUPTA

On July 26 2020, the Editorial Board of The Contrarian hosted a workshop on Academic Writing, conducted by Ms Jasmin, Assistant Professor, Economics Department of Jesus and Mary College. Academic writing is integral to research and creation of knowledge; it provides a structure to abstract thoughts and ideas. In light of this, the workshop aimed to introduce this pertinent style of writing to the budding scholars of The Contrarian. Active participation and fruitful discussion was witnessed throughout the workshop.

The central question which served as the point of departure for the workshop inquired about the salient characteristics of a good academic paper. In answer to this, Jasmin ma'am led a detailed and structured discussion, exploring in detail, the different facets of academic writing, summarised as follows;

1. Motivation behind the research

An important aspect of any academic paper, which needs to be given serious thought and consideration. One's motivation behind writing a paper can be to study the impact of regulatory change or policies or to discover underlying truths and problems behind an unresolved issue. This needs to be explicitly articulated - what motivates one to study a phenomenon or issue?

2. Need for the study

What is the need of this study at this juncture? For example, between the choice to study a situation, pre- or post-crisis, one might justify that the study should be undertaken post-crisis; the problems and effects associated with the concerned phenomenon are likely to have intensified, and more data regarding it would be available. Thus, this study might reveal new underlying information regarding the crisis and its aftermath.

3. Gap identification for contribution

Before starting the research, one needs to be aware of and caught up on the existing literature on the phenomenon that they intend to study. The aim of writing a research paper should always be to come up with something new by finding gaps in existing research and filling them with new findings and inferences.

4. Aim

One needs to be very clear about what they intend to achieve with the study. What are the various questions being addressed in the research? What timeline is being followed? One has to have very clear and precise answers to such questions.





5. Theoretical structure

While writing a paper, one should include both- the theory that supports their content as well as literature that does not. This helps in providing a good foundation for research and arms the research with strong arguments. The theoretical structure should be written comprehensively.

6. Constructs and Variables

Constructs are broad concepts or topics for a study. Variables are created by developing the construct into a measurable form. One needs to ensure that models employed for research are adequate, but not heavy. One should define and clarify the dependent and independent variables; providing a list (the list might not be exhaustive) is a good way forward. For this, the theoretical structure can be referred.

7. Hypothesis

After the formulation of the problem, the hypothesis is formed, which is the tentative and testable statement about the relationship between the variables. This needs to be very clearly specified. Empirical findings can be used to substantiate it.

8. Model Deployed

With the revolution of data, enormous amounts of models are available. The researcher is the best judge of which model needs to be employed.

9. Approach to analysis

An analysis can be both qualitative or quantitative. When reviewing a paper, trend-analysis or policies, one is advised to tilt towards qualitative

analysis. While, when following a quantitative analysis, one needs to be clear about the technique applied. There is no harm in applying qualitative analysis to any discussion

10. Findings

It is required to map/link all findings that come out of research with the objective/hypothesis of the research. These findings will either validate or invalidate the hypothesis generated.

11. Implications of the findings

One of the most important questions attached to research is whether the research holds potential to make a difference/effect change? If one, for example, studies wage inequality and finds that gender wage gap is one of the biggest contributors to wage inequality, then providing realistic workable solutions can make a huge contribution. One should strive to ensure that their research contributes to the society.

12. Direction for future research

There is always scope for improvement and furthering arguments. There are always going to be gaps that need to be filled. Any research or study should be done with open eyes and minds. The study should always be concluded on a positive note, encouraging further research on the topic at hand.



13. Publications

Before sending a paper to a publication, one should be familiar with the content, writing style and structure of the papers published by the particular publication/journals. This will enable one to understand where their research can reach their intended audience.

Throughout the session, attendees fielded pertinent inquiries to Jasmin ma'am. These insightful questions ranged from elementary doubts about how to find a research question, the usage of jargon in a paper to esoteric concerns regarding the handling of variables during Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs), collecting primary data etc.

By the end of the workshop, everyone gained an in-depth understanding of academic writing as well as the field of academia and research, owing to Jasmin ma'am's vast experience and knowledge. She concluded the workshop by imparting pragmatic and humbling advice; *Partial knowledge is worse than no knowledge at all. Research is no piece of cake. Thus, there needs to be a more amicable relationship between budding scholars. Collaboration is a good way to engage in research as one's strengths can be others' weakness and vice versa.*

Research is like a tree, it should only grow.

Edited by Prisha Saxena

WORKSHOP ON DESIGN THINKING

REPORT WRITTEN BY
ANSHIKA MARIA SUNNY & REENU JOMY KANDATHIL

On 12th September 2020, the Economics department of JMC conducted a workshop on Design Thinking - a creative approach to problem solving. The session started at 11am and continued for the next 90 minutes on Zoom Cloud meetings. It was hosted by a consultancy called The Change Designers. It was hosted by Ms Anu Sachdev and Ms Pallavi Jain.

Ms Anu Sachdev is a practitioner of narrative based social change strategies specializing in transmedia campaigns, Entertainment Education, Human-Centred Design and complexity science approaches to social change. She has international experience and expertise in design, production, implementation and extensive monitoring & evaluation for social change programs. Ms Pallavi Jain is a passionate communicator and storyteller specializing in social, organizational and behavioural change strategies of Entertainment-Education, Positive Deviance and Design Thinking. Her expertise lies in Research & Development, Program Design & Implementation and Human-Centred Design. She has vast international experience in creating large scale campaigns and strategies for social change and corporate communication.

It was an interactive workshop that successfully introduced the concept of Design Thinking to the students. It started with an introduction of the concept and its evolution. It was developed at Stanford University and is a creative and strategic approach to solving complex problems that involves empathizing with the user to create effective solutions. The process as a whole is iterative and involves connecting with the user. It sheds light on the importance of thinking from the user's perspective and effective communication between the stakeholder and user.

Next, the students were put into groups of 4 or 5 to get hands-on experience with the design thinking approach. They were given the roles of a consultant hired by a confectioner to re-introduce a once-failed chocolate into the market. The students were put into their respective breakout rooms to discuss the same. This exercise was done in 4 stages. The first step involved the members of the groups identifying themselves as users or producers and the producers interviewed the users on why they didn't like the product. The next stage was to develop a causes and symptoms chart that led to the identification of the core problems. The third step was to find





the crazy eight solutions to the problem and the last step was to storyboard the problem, solution and outcome.

In between each stage, the students joined back to the main meeting and were given instructions on how to perform the next task. This exercise helped the students get an idea on the practical application of the concept. It was the exciting and engaging process that became the highlight of the workshop. Towards the end, students were briefed on the various courses offered and were asked to give feedback about the workshop.

The programme was a fun learning and interactive experience for the students. It equipped the students with a new approach to solve almost every problem they come across and widened their horizons of creative thinking.

Edited by Arpita Mary Abraham

PREPAREDNESS OF THE HEALTH SECTOR TO DEAL WITH PANDEMICS IN INDIA

WEBINAR BY PROFESSOR INDRANI GUPTA: A SUMMARY
BY AMRITHA BIJU

On October 28, 2020, the Economics Department of Jesus and Mary College organized an interactive webinar with Professor Indrani Gupta to discuss the preparedness of India's health infrastructure and its essential services in combating COVID-19 pandemic. The guest speaker, Ms Indrani Gupta, is a Professor and the Head of the Health Policy Research Unit (HPRU) at the Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi. Established in 1988, HPRU is the first of its kind research centre committed to expanding the depth of health economics and policy in India. Professor Gupta has worked extensively as a teacher at various academic institutes and held positions in the World Bank and the Government of India. She has a PhD degree in Economics from the University of Maryland, College Park, USA and a Master's degree in Economics from the University of Delhi.

During her lecture, Professor Gupta spoke at length about health financing as necessary—though not a sufficient condition—for building a resilient health sector that can withstand any unforeseen shocks or calamities. Historically, evidenced by the meagre investment in the health sector, India has consistently prioritized health lowly and is therefore unprepared to manage any infectious diseases or outbreaks. With significant shortfalls in the Indian health sector, elaborate population-based health infrastructure and personnel have been an unfulfilled promise to India and the mismatch in the demand of these facilities has been met

by rapid, unregulated growth of private healthcare providers. Statistics reveal that adults and the elderly are likely to be disproportionately impacted by the spread of the infection. Therefore, a resilient surveillance mechanism, ample health personnel, sufficient medical supplies and equipment, and continuous training are integral to building a responsive, well-equipped healthcare system.

Edited by Arunima Srivastava

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